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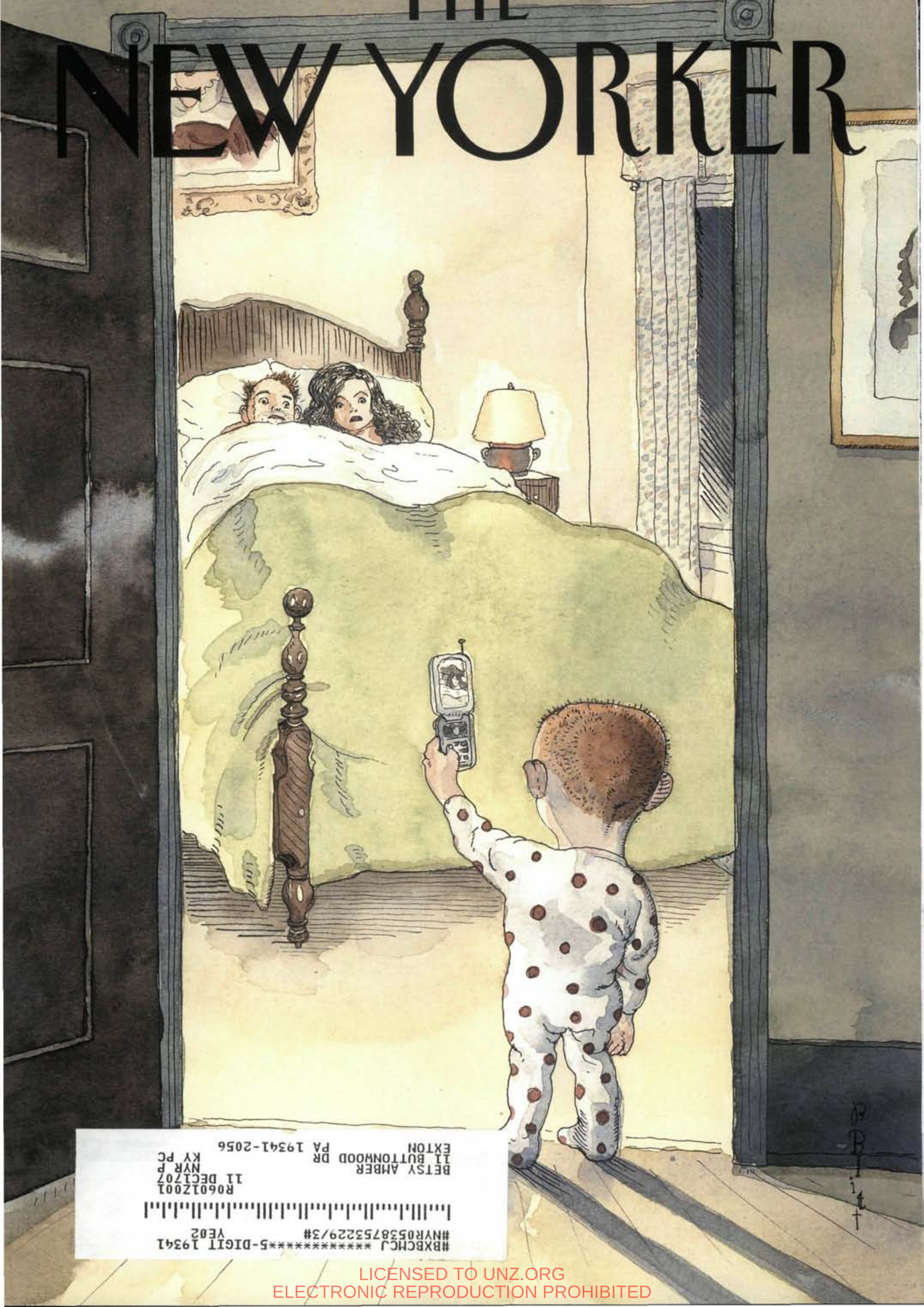
JAN. 29, 2007



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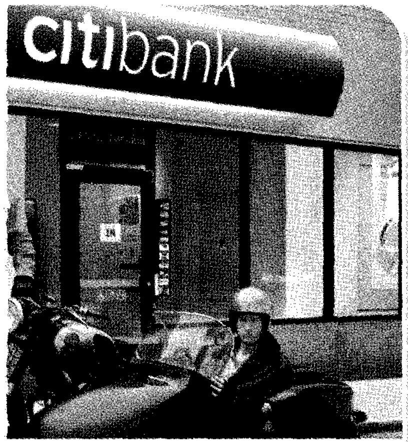

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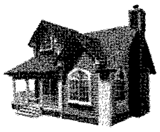

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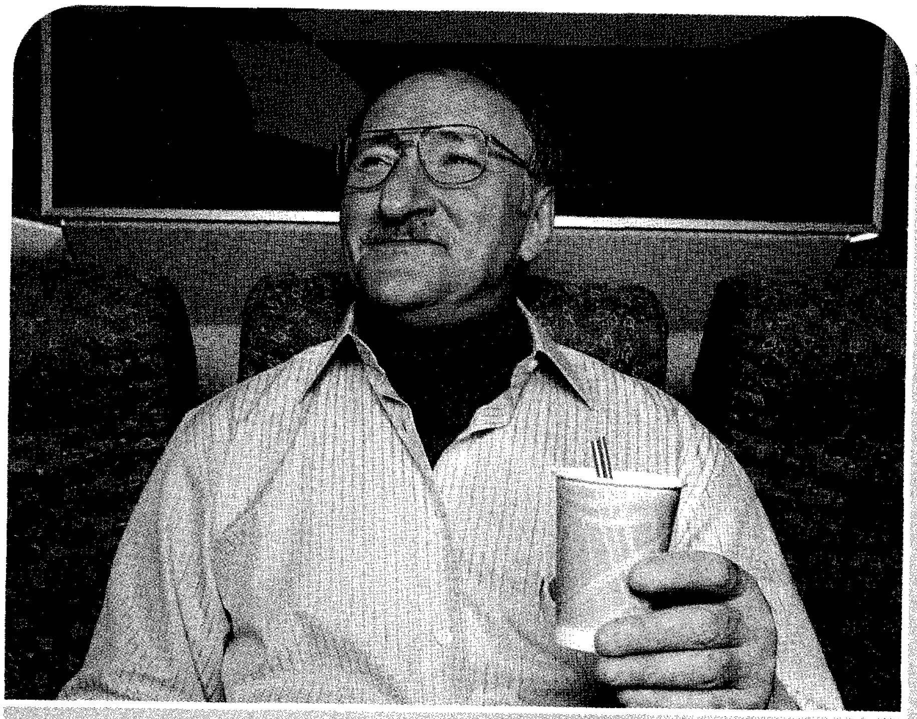

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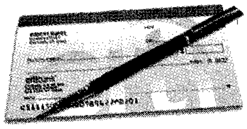

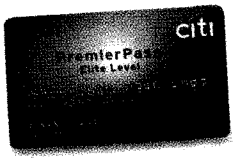

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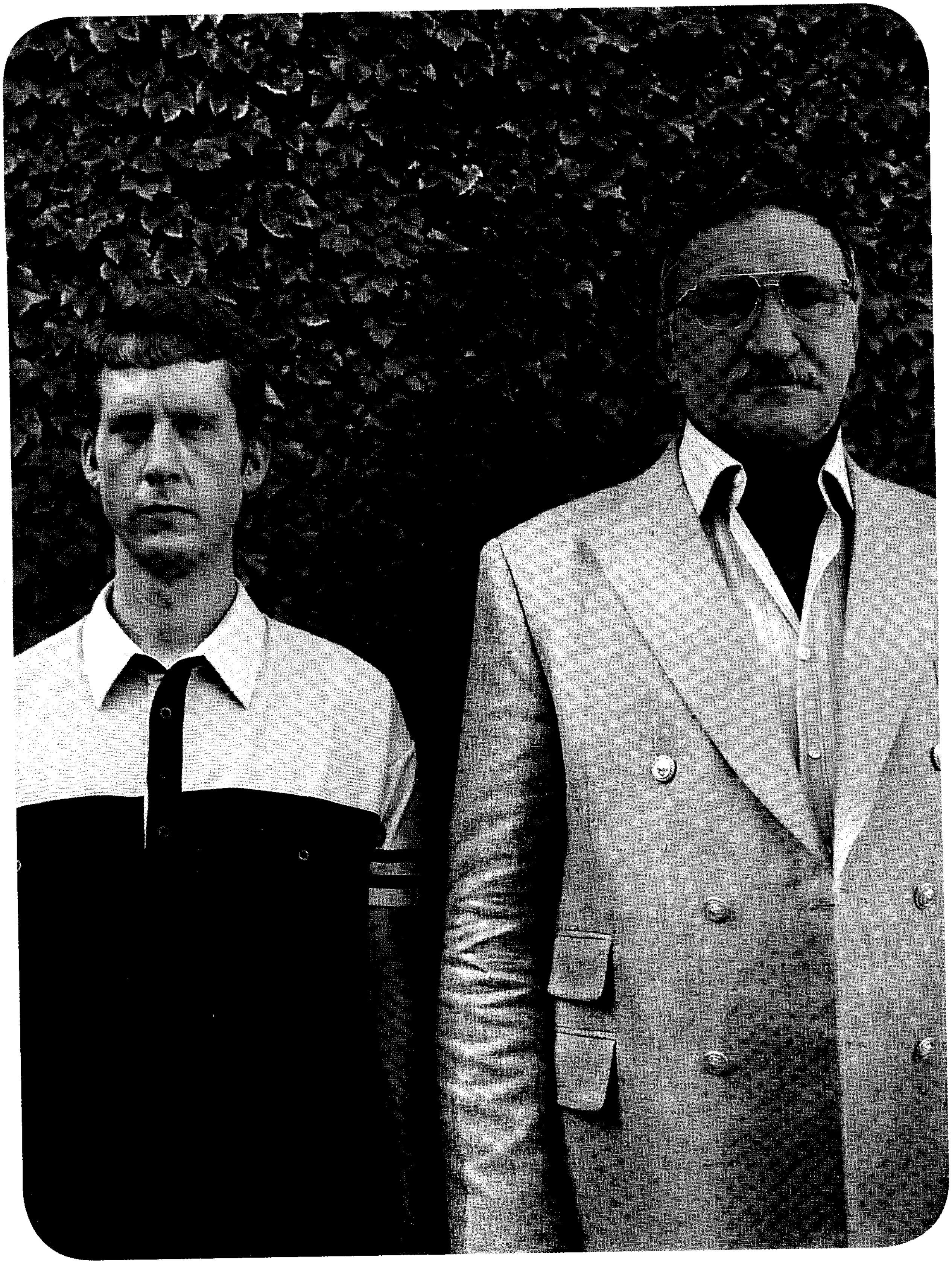

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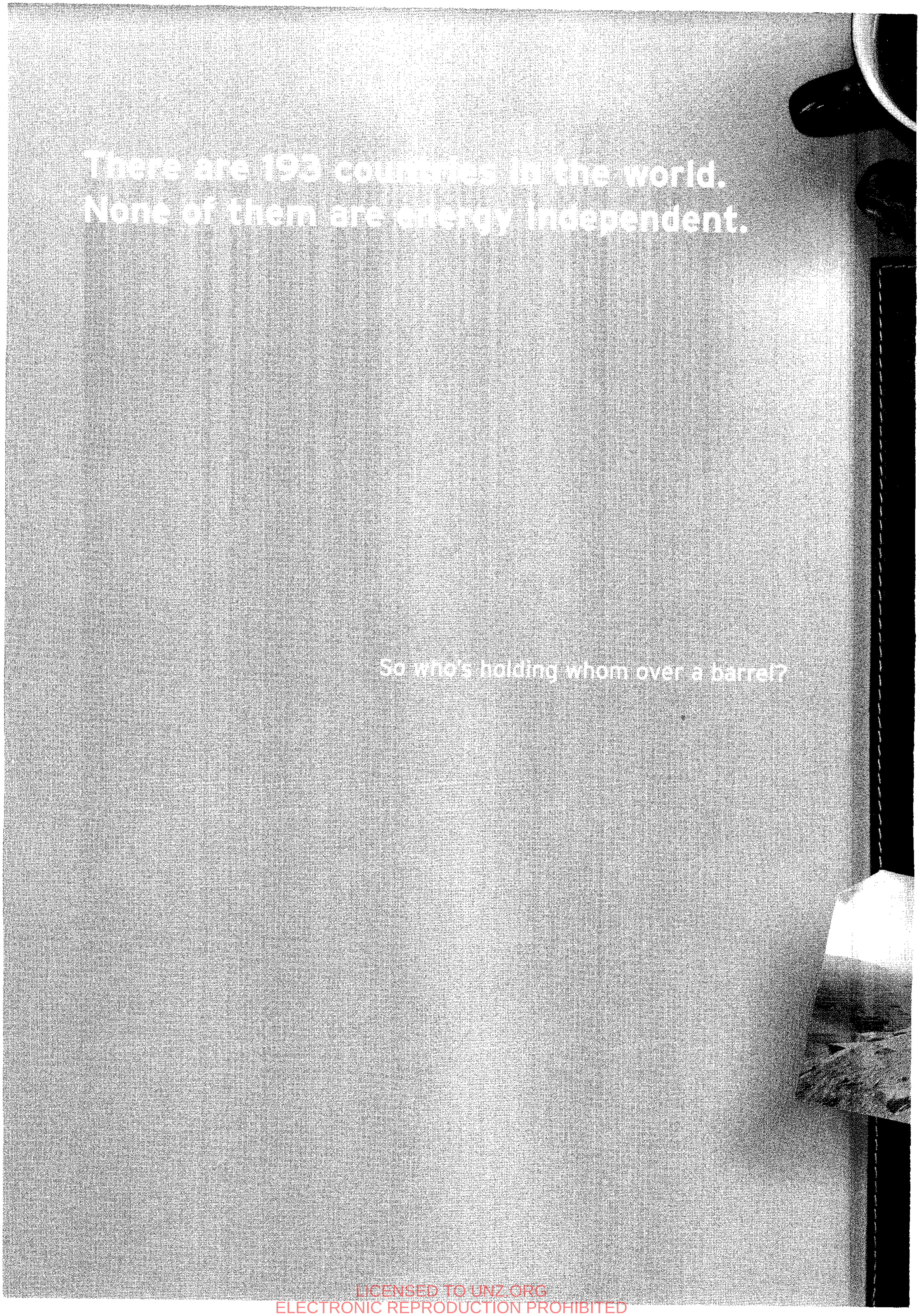
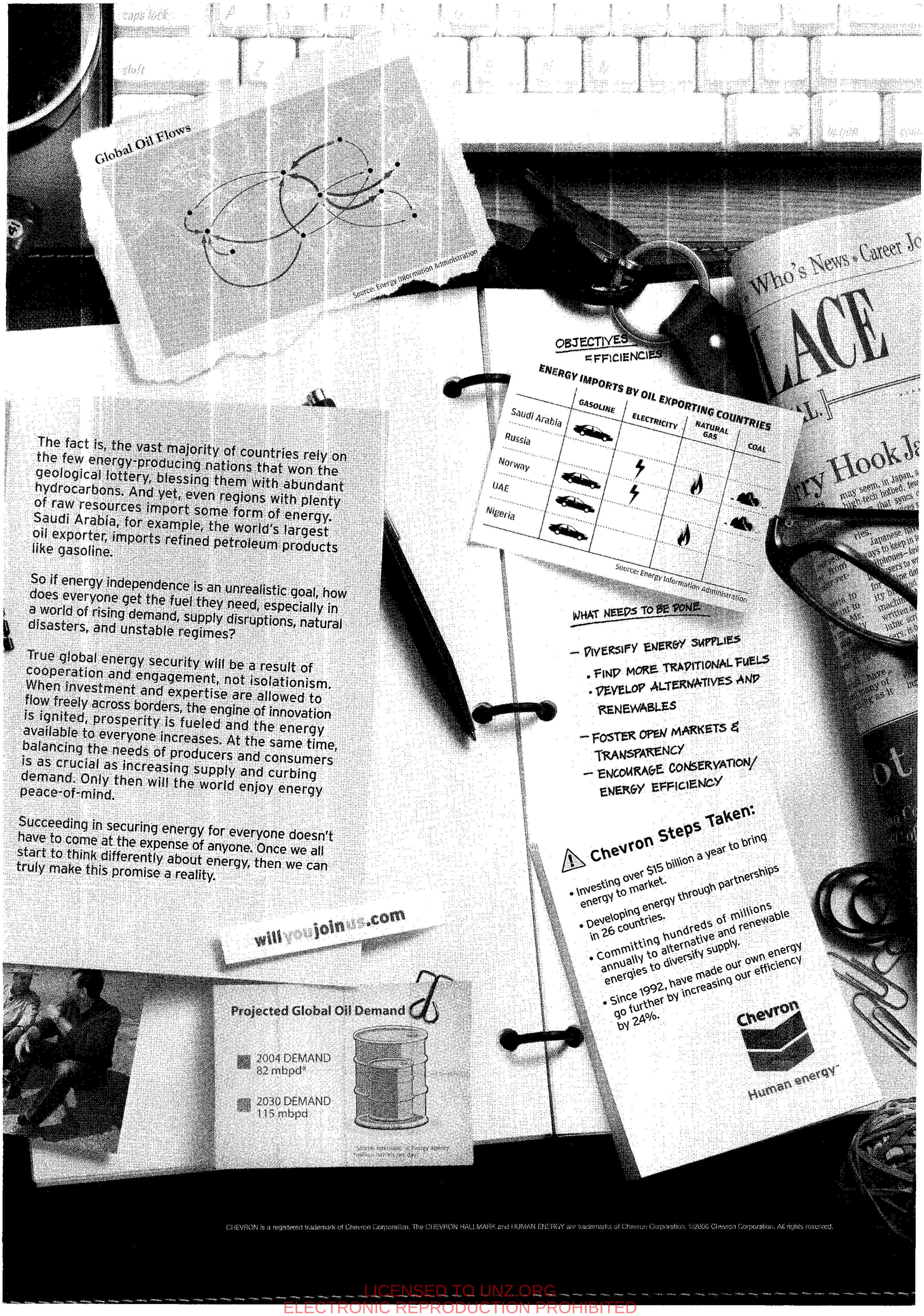

There are 193 countries in the world.
None of them are energy independent.
So who's holding whom over a barrel?



Global Oil Flows

Source: Energy Information Administration

OBJECTIVES

EFFICIENCIES

ENERGY IMPORTS BY OIL EXPORTING COUNTRIES

	GASOLINE	ELECTRICITY	NATURAL GAS	COAL
Saudi Arabia	✓			
Russia		✓	✓	✓
Norway	✓	✓		✓
UAE	✓		✓	
Nigeria	✓			

Source: Energy Information Administration

The fact is, the vast majority of countries rely on the few energy-producing nations that won the geological lottery, blessing them with abundant hydrocarbons. And yet, even regions with plenty of raw resources import some form of energy. Saudi Arabia, for example, the world's largest oil exporter, imports refined petroleum products like gasoline.

So if energy independence is an unrealistic goal, how does everyone get the fuel they need, especially in a world of rising demand, supply disruptions, natural disasters, and unstable regimes?

True global energy security will be a result of cooperation and engagement, not isolationism. When investment and expertise are allowed to flow freely across borders, the engine of innovation is ignited, prosperity is fueled and the energy available to everyone increases. At the same time, balancing the needs of producers and consumers is as crucial as increasing supply and curbing demand. Only then will the world enjoy energy peace-of-mind.

Succeeding in securing energy for everyone doesn't have to come at the expense of anyone. Once we all start to think differently about energy, then we can truly make this promise a reality.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- DIVERSIFY ENERGY SUPPLIES
  - FIND MORE TRADITIONAL FUELS
  - DEVELOP ALTERNATIVES AND RENEWABLES
- FOSTER OPEN MARKETS & TRANSPARENCY
- ENCOURAGE CONSERVATION/ ENERGY EFFICIENCY

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Projected Global Oil Demand

- ▨ 2004 DEMAND 82 mbpd*
- ▨ 2030 DEMAND 115 mbpd

Source: International Energy Agency
*million barrels per day

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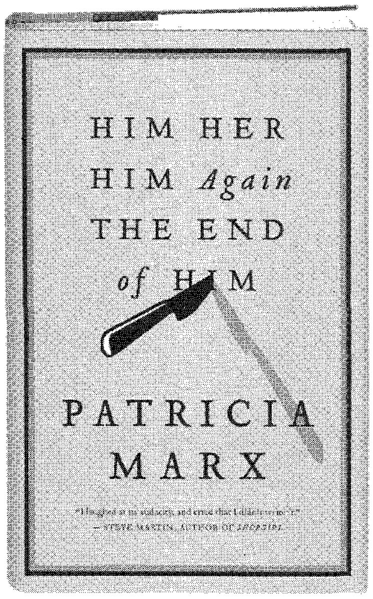
"I laughed at its audacity, and cried that I didn't write it."

—Steve Martin,
author of *Shopgirl* and
The Pleasure of My Company



"Marx's tale of love sort of found and sort of lost in Cambridge and Manhattan will make any reader laugh hard and think harder."

—Adam Gopnik,
author of *Through the Children's Gate*

"A wildly funny sad book. Or a wildly sad funny book."

— Patricia Volk,
O, The Oprah Magazine

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JANUARY 29, 2007

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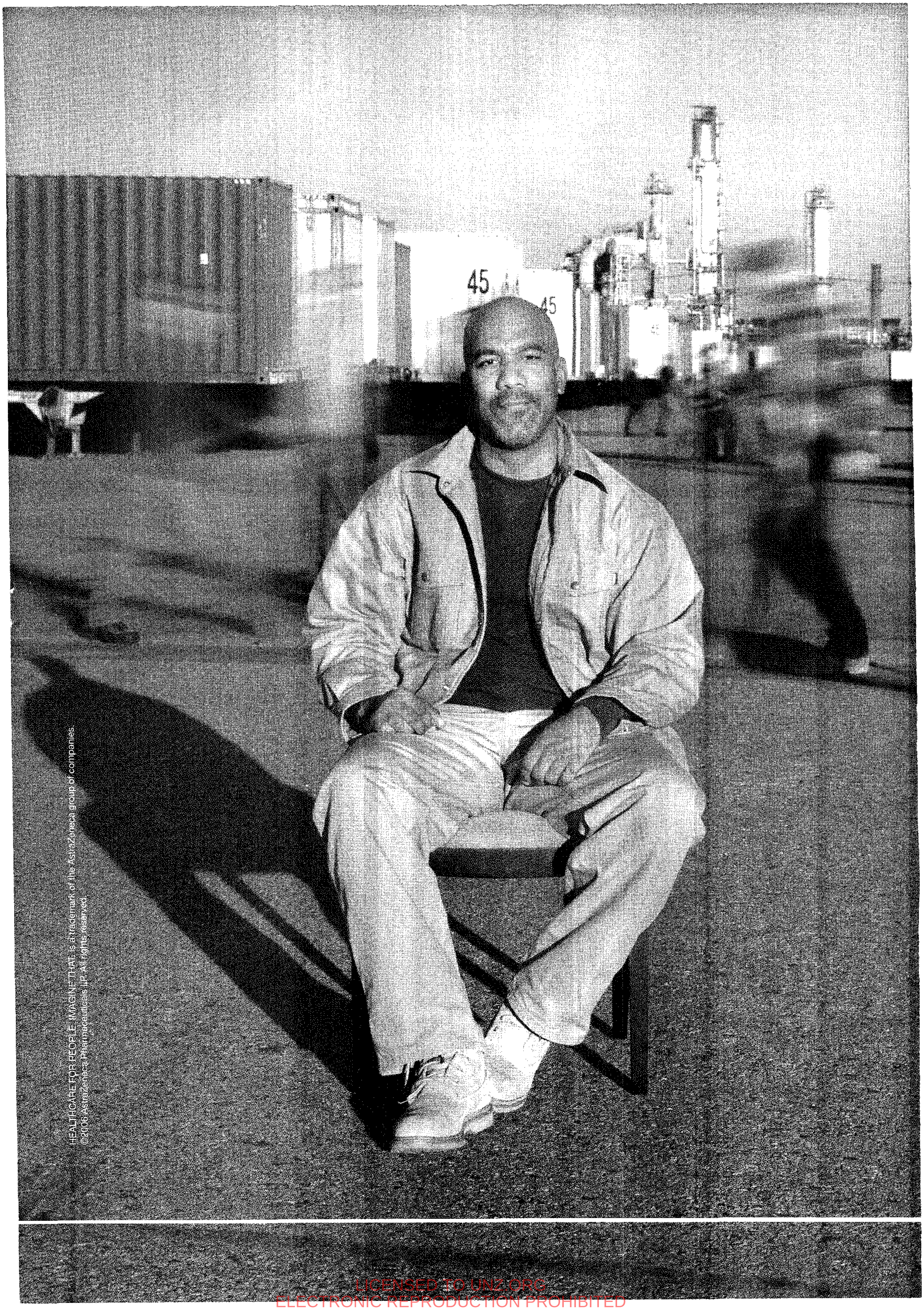

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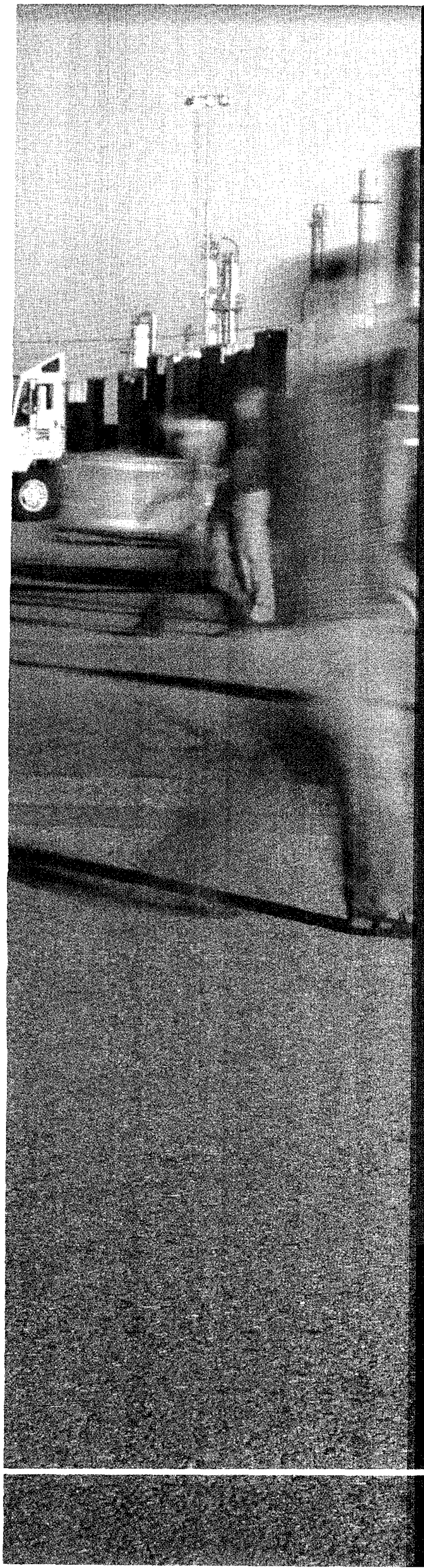

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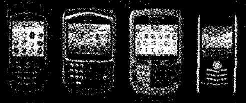

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jerome Groopman ("What's the Trouble?," p. 36) is the Recanati Professor of Medicine at Harvard. His new book, "How Doctors Think," comes out in March.

Nicholas Lemann (Comment, p. 31) is the dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University.

Jeffrey Goldberg (The Talk of the Town, p. 32) recently published "Prisoners: A Muslim and a Jew Across the Middle East Divide."

Steve Martin (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 42) is working on two books: "Our Alphabet Book," with Roz Chast, and a memoir, "Born Standing Up."

David Sedaris ("The Birds," p. 44) has contributed to the magazine since 1995. He is the author of several books of essays, including "Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim."

Michael Specter ("Kremlin, Inc.," p. 50), a staff writer, was a Moscow correspondent for the *Times* from 1994 to 1998.

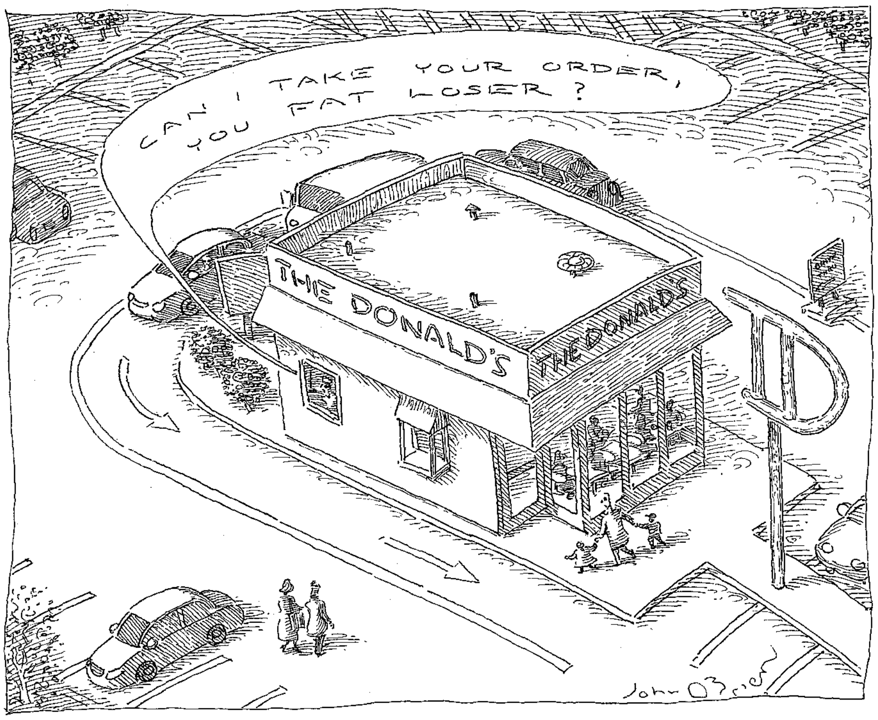
Louise Glück (Poem, p. 58) was the U.S. Poet Laureate for 2003-04. Her tenth book of poems, "Averno," will be published in paperback next month.

Ben McGrath ("Walking Away," p. 64) is a staff writer.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Fiction, p. 72) has published two novels, "Purple Hibiscus" and "Half of a Yellow Sun."

Caleb Crain (Books, p. 78) is the author of "American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation."

John Updike (Books, p. 85) is a regular contributor of fiction, poetry, and criticism. "Terrorist" is his latest novel. ♦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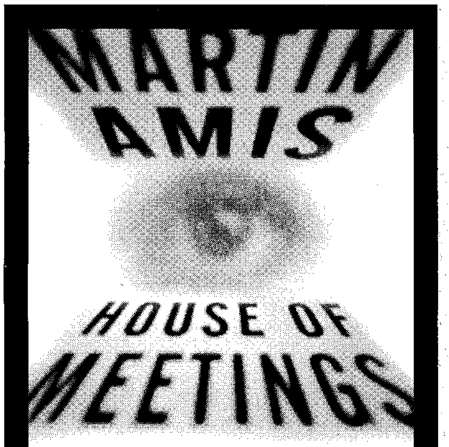

THE NEW YORK TIMES calls Martin Amis's new novel

"Arguably his most powerful book yet

...A bullet train of a novel that barrels deep into the heart of darkness that was the Soviet gulag... An unrelenting, deeply affecting performance"
—MICHIKO KAKUTANI

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—THE ECONOMIST

THE NEW YORKER hails
"His sheer courage as a writer"
—JOAN ACOCELLA

"A moving novel, streaked with dark comedy,
[and] unmistakably his best since *London Fields*"
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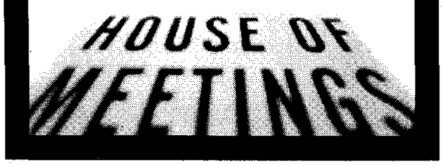

THE MAIL

THE CELLULOID SCREEN

David Denby, in his article on the future of film production and distribution, touches on numerous factors that could make film viewing less satisfying ("Big Pictures," January 8th). As Denby notes, film is "more poetic" than digital imagery; further, I believe that, until the visual quality of digital technology improves, the art of cinema will depend on its creators' continuing to shoot on film. Although analogue and digital photography are often described as merely giving different "looks," film has had the advantage of a hundred years of technological development prior to the rise of digital filmmaking. This shows in the subtlety and solidity of the images it can register in all kinds of lighting situations. At present, filmmakers working with digital video must make do with a radically reduced palette—something like classical pianists being forced to play on electric pianos.
Peter MacCallum
Toronto, Ont.

NEW YORK, OLD AND NEW

Adam Gopnik, in his Comment on the city's transformation over the past thirty years, reflects on the fear that New York is becoming less like New York (The Talk of the Town, January 8th). Yet the New York of collective memory is an anomaly, a mid-century artifact of national economic and political factors. That it was a more middle-class city than today's New York was a product of the high-paying manufacturing jobs available in most American cities between the nineteen-forties and the nineteen-seventies. It was a more native-born, more English-speaking, and more white city, as nearly all American cities were, because of the tight immigration restrictions that Congress imposed in the twenties, which were loosened in the sixties and again in the eighties. But for most of its history New York was a place of wealth and poverty and not nearly as much in between as we would like it to have been, a place of constant ethnic turnover fuelled by immigration, a place of rampant growth. In that way, today's New York is truer to the historical New York than is the New York of collective memory.
Richard Perez-Pena
Glen Rock, N.J.

I read Gopnik's Comment with the melancholy satisfaction that I'm not alone in my feeling that the New York I have always loved is inexorably slipping away and, indeed, may already be gone. I came to this city nearly thirty years ago to be where all things possible emerged from all things mixed. The city is so much less interesting now that Fendi trumps literature on every corner of Bleecker Street; eyes don't meet for being buried in e-mail; and the only artists you're likely to meet are visiting from Europe, guidebook in hand, looking for where it all began. New York has become a memory.
Tom Bloom
New York City

DEFINING DEATH

Jerome Groopman's article on the debate over providing experimental medicines to terminal patients describes Terri Schiavo as "brain-dead" and Nancy Cruzan as "a young woman who had suffered brain death . . . and whose parents were seeking legal permission to disconnect her from life support" ("The Right to a Trial," December 18th). Both women, when they became famous as subjects of legal dispute, were actually in persistent vegetative states, not brain-dead. The distinction is of medical, legal, and ethical importance. Only because Schiavo and Cruzan were alive, although unable to make their own decisions, were their cases appropriate for Dr. Groopman's discussion.
David Goldblatt, M.D.
Penn Yan, N.Y.

•

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A rehearsal for the musical "Spring Awakening." Photograph by Gus Powell.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
PLAY IT AGAIN

The playwright Christopher Durang has cast his darkly absurdist eye on everything from the Catholic Church to Tennessee Williams. Now, he has teamed up with Peter Melnick, grandson of Richard Rodgers, for "Adrift in Macao," a film-noir musical set in a fun-house version of "Casablanca." (See page 14.)

NIGHT LIFE
JAM SESSION

For nearly three decades, Paul Weller has been one of England's biggest rock stars. He led the Jam in the late seventies, went on to form Style Council in the eighties, and has been a revered solo artist for more than a decade. Though his greatest influences are American R. & B. and soul, he has remained a cult star Stateside. On the heels of a career-spanning boxed set, "Hit Parade," he's playing his old songs live for the first time in years during a three-night stand at Irving Plaza. (See page 16.)

ART
AN ILL WIND

The Gitterman gallery's highly satisfying show of Debbie Fleming Caffery's photographs includes images of Hurricane Katrina's lingering devastations in Caffery's home state of Louisiana. (See page 18.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HIGH PERFORMANCE

The atmosphere at "The Movado Hour," a series of salon-like concerts at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, may be laid-back, but the performers are consistently impassioned. The St. Lawrence String Quartet certainly fits the bill; its program features works by Haydn, Shostakovich, and Schumann. (See page 25.)

MOVIES
WAR STORIES

In her essay-like documentaries, the Brooklyn-based filmmaker Lynne Sachs considers history as personal experience. Anthology Film Archives offers a weekend of her work, including "Investigation of a Flame," about Vietnam War-era resisters, and "States of Unbelonging," about the murder of an Israeli woman filmmaker. Sachs will be present for a discussion at all screenings. (See page 28.)

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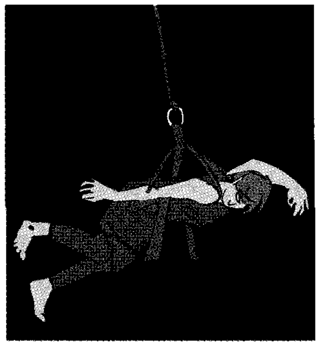
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FROM A MARRIAGE

In Susan Marshall's work, the grizzled virtues of traditional modern dance—the bare feet, the weightiness, the sincerity—come out looking newborn.



JEROEN KOOLHAAS

Her "Cloudless" is a series of eighteen scenes in which, quite often, we're not at all sure what's going on. Why are those five people nestled together in a box? Why is this man clapping his hand over the mouth of a screaming woman, and then kissing her as she screams some more? Yet the dancers are wholly confident about what they're doing. It makes sense to them, and, therefore, it soon makes sense to us. This combination of ambiguity and clarity is the essence of good dance, but Marshall's particular strength is the intimacy of her performers' encounters. We could be spying on a scene from a fifty-year marriage. Something else about Marshall: she often focusses on heterosexual feeling, a rare concern in downtown dance these days. In her hands, it looks like a fascinating new topic. "Cloudless" sold out at Dance Theatre Workshop last spring. D.T.W. is reviving it this week and next.

—*Joan Acocella*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ADRIFT IN MACAO
Primary Stages presents a musical parody of film noir, with a book and lyrics by the seasoned absurdist Christopher Durang and music by Peter Melnick. Sheryl Kaller directs. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

ALL THAT I WILL EVER BE
The world première of a new play by Alan Ball ("Six Feet Under"), about the relationship between a Los Angeles native and a Middle Eastern immigrant. Directed by Jo Bonney. In previews. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

AT LEAST IT'S PINK
A new musical by Bridget Everett, Michael Patrick King ("Sex and the City"), and Kenny Mellman (of Kiki & Herb), in which a young woman journeys from Manhattan, Kansas, to Manhattan, New York. King also directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

THE FEVER
Wallace Shawn plays a man of privilege who is forced to confront the poverty of the Third World, in the New Group's revival of his one-person drama. Scott Elliott directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 29. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

FRANK'S HOME
A new play by Richard Nelson ("James Joyce's The Dead") explores Frank Lloyd Wright's troubled family life. Robert Falls directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 30. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE FRUGAL REPAST
Ron Hirsen's play, directed by Joe Grifasi, is about two Parisian clowns who steal a Picasso painting after discovering that they are its subjects. Previews begin Jan. 26. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

IN THE HEIGHTS
The ethnic mix of Washington Heights is the focus of this new musical, with music and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda and a book by Quiara Alegria Hudes. In previews. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100.)

THE JEW OF MALTA / THE MERCHANT OF VENICE
Theatre for a New Audience presents Christopher Marlowe's play and its Shakespearean counterpart in repertory, with F. Murray Abraham as their respective Jewish villains, Barabas and Shylock. In previews. (Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST WORD . . .
In this drama by Oren Safdie, Daniel J. Travanti plays a Holocaust survivor who enlists a headstrong N.Y.U. student as his writing assistant. Previews begin Jan. 30. (Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

ONCE THERE WAS A VILLAGE
Czechoslovak-American Marionette Theatre tells the multigenerational story of immigrant life in the East Village, drawing on Yuri Kapralov's book of the same name. Opens Jan. 25. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

A SPANISH PLAY
John Turturro directs Zoe Caldwell and Denis O'Hare in the English-language première of Yasmina Reza's new work, which takes place at a theatre rehearsal. In previews. (Classic Stage, 136 E. 13th St. 212-677-4210.)

TRANSLATIONS
Manhattan Theatre Club revives Brian Friel's drama from 1980, about an Irish town contending with the forces of cultural imperialism. Garry Hynes directs. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WAKE UP MR. SLEEPY! YOUR UNCONSCIOUS MIND IS DEAD!
The avant-garde master Richard Foreman returns, with a multimedia piece that links the birth of air travel to the death of the modern imagination. In previews. Opens Jan. 25. (Ontological Theatre at St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

AS YET THOU ART YOUNG AND RASH
In Target Margin's lollygagging new adaptation, Euripides' "Suppliants" is viewed through the kinetic prism of the martial arts, and the results are far from edifying. The director, David Herskovits, appropriates the physical idiom and slow pacing of a Tai Chi master or an aikido sensei, but what's lost in this contemporary rewrite is any sense of tension or tragic inevitability. The story concerns the bereaved mothers of Argos, who petition their victorious enemies, the Thebans, to return the bodies of their sons. But you'd never know it from this production. With its stylized tempo and dramaturgical stutters, it manages to bury the real talents of its five-person cast. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 212-352-3101.)

BILLBOARD
In 2005, a man from Omaha used eBay to auction off advertising space on his forehead and scored more than thirty-seven thousand dollars from a company selling a snoring remedy. The playwright Michael Vukadinovich has employed this odd news bit as a jumping-off point for a comic exploration of personal and corporate greed. Commercialism vs. art, big media vs. the soul of the American people—the battle lines are clearly drawn. But they're expressed in a repetitive, wisecracking sitcom rhythm, and the effect is neither funny nor especially thought-provoking. With Ken Matthews as the human billboard, Sarah K. Lippmann as his artist girlfriend, and Joey Piscopo as his liberal-cause-loving friend. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BLACKOUT
Michael I. Walker's likable dramatic comedy hinges on the power outage of August, 2003, when New Yorkers—still wary after 9/11—managed to let their guards down and forge immediate bonds. Set in Hell's Kitchen, on the stoop of a jazz bar owned by a philosophical black saxophonist (Kevin Mambo), the play concerns the erotic collisions and realignments among a small group of strangers. The first to meet are a daffy Southern Baptist gal, whose love for James Baldwin inspired her ill-timed trip to New York, and a lonely, gay writer manqué. Other sorts of yin-yang pairings follow, and Walker's dramatizations of them are especially lively when he sheds his literary influences and lets his characters take charge. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 27.)

DUTCHMAN
A revival of Amiri Baraka's 1964 race drama, about a white woman's seduction of a black man on a train. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-989-2020.)

GET YOUR WAR ON
The characters in David Rees's comic strip "Get Your War On" are proudly liberal water-cooler skeptics in ties and sweaters, equally beleaguered and amused by the day's news and never without a succinctly glib response. In this adaptation by Kirk Lynn ("Major Bang"), the Austin-based company Rude Mechanicals stages a gleeful retrospective of Rees's work from the past six years, employing a clever system of overhead projections to bridge the gap between theatre and three-panel comics. Operation Enduring Freedom, Terri Schiavo, freedom fries—they may be yesterday's headlines, but Rees treats them with a wry humor that manages to feel both fresh and pointed. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 28.)

GUTENBERG! THE MUSICAL!
The return of Scott Brown and Anthony King's goofy and inspired parody of Broadway bombast, which takes place at a backers' audition for an ill-conceived musical by two aspiring musical-theatre writers. With Christopher Fitzgerald and Jeremy Shamos. (The Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 212-239-6200.)

Ellen DeGeneres. ©2006 American Express Company.

My name ELLEN DEGENERES

childhood ambition TO WORK WITH ANIMALS

fondest memory I CAN'T RECALL, BUT I'M SURE I'M FOND OF IT.

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THE MONUMENT
In Colleen Wagner's play, presented by the Clockwork Theatre, a woman rescues a convicted war criminal from execution, on the condition that he obey her every command. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 28.)

MUST DON'T WHIP 'UM
The alt-country artist Cynthia Hopkins plays a failed nineteen-seventies singer staging her farewell concert, in this prequel to her 2004 show "Accidental Nostalgia." (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

THE POLISH PLAY
This Katharsis Theatre Company production, conceived and directed by Henry Wishcamper, combines the plots of "Macbeth" and "Ubu Roi" and features a mixed cast of live actors and puppets. (Walker Space, 46 Walker St. 212-868-4444.)

TOYS IN THE ATTIC
Lillian Hellman's penultimate play, first produced in 1960, is as creaky as an old fourposter bed. Though it can be pleasant to rest for a moment in its carefully embroidered sheets—if only to be reminded of the familiar scents with which Hellman sprinkled her most autobiographical work: incest, miscegenation, and camellias—the play's charm is musty and, in the end, tiresome. Austin Pendleton's revival at the Pearl Theatre Company is stilted, mute where it should sing, suddenly busy when it should be still. Pendleton—a fine director and character actor—seems out of place in this suffocating room, which Hellman has littered with chintz, lace, and the kind of female softness and regret that was not her natural forte as a writer. (Reviewed in our issue of 1/22/07.) (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

UNDER THE RADAR 2007
The Public Theatre presents its third annual festival of new work, with offerings from Allen Johnson, Daniel MacIvor, and Tarell Alvin McCraney, among others. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. For complete schedule, visit www.publictheater.org. Through Jan. 28.)

THE VIETNAMIZATION OF NEW JERSEY
The Off Broadway début of Christopher Durang's 1977 comedy, about a Vietnam veteran returning to his parents' house in Piscataway. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 28.)

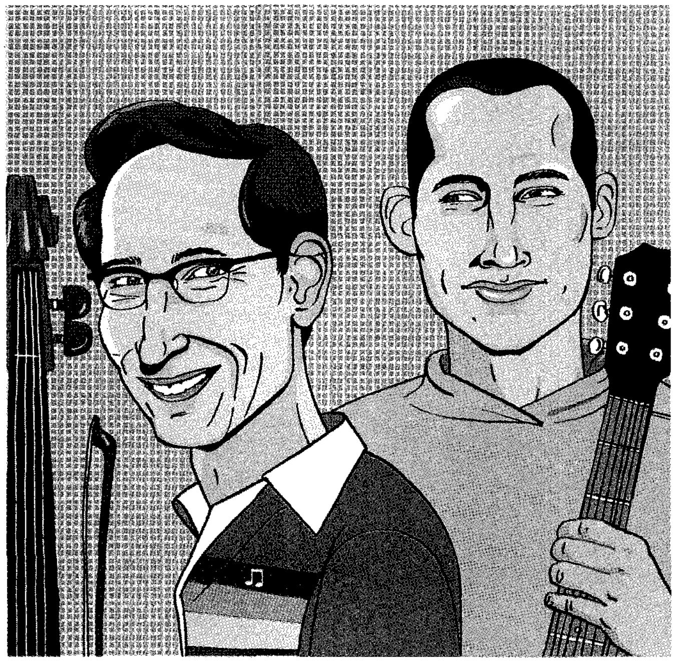
Also Playing

THE APPLE TREE: Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART TWO: SHIPWRECK:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LITTLE DOG LAUGHED:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **MARY POPPINS:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **REGRETS ONLY:** City Center, Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Through Jan. 28. **ROOM SERVICE:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE SCENE:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TWO TRAINS RUNNING:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Through Jan. 28. **THE VERTICAL HOUR:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE:** Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Jan. 25: Long Island's **Blue Öyster Cult** has long straddled the worlds of proto-metal rock heroics and eggheaded sci-fi shenanigans. The band, now well into its third decade and its umpteenth lineup—although still centered on the vocalist Eric Bloom and the guitarists Donald (Buck Dharma) Roeser and Allen Lanier—continues on its Spinal Tap-ish course. Jan. 27: The soul icon **Isaac Hayes.**



The adventurous duo the Books play Webster Hall this week.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Jan. 30: **Peter Bjorn and John** are indie rockers with a soft spot for the winsome pop of the sixties. The three friends from Stockholm, Sweden, punctuate their sunny vision with handclaps, whistling, and other sweet effects.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Jan. 25: **Blue October,** a confrontational quintet from Texas, plays blistering, confessional rock. Jan. 26: The eclectic fare of San Francisco's **Deerhoof.** Jan. 29-31: The ever-dapper **Paul Weller** made his musical début as a teen-ager, at the height of the late-seventies British punk scene, with his band the Jam, which quickly came to rule over the mod revival. At the peak of the band's popularity, in 1982, Weller broke up the Jam and formed the Style Council, to pursue his interest in vintage R. & B., Motown, soul, and smooth jazz. The Style Council, which alienated many of his original fans, lasted until the end of the eighties. After its demise, he launched a solo career that secured his reputation as an avatar of the nineties Brit-pop movement and one of England's biggest stars. For these three shows, Weller is performing an unprecedented career retrospective, with the songs of the Jam on the first night, Style Council material on the second, and his own songs on the last.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Jan. 25: The local favorites in the **Undisputed Heavyweights** come armed with lounge-ready shtick, but they are more than just tongue-in-cheek hipsters. Brandishing acoustic guitars and a horn section, the Heavyweights deliver an accomplished rock/blues/soul hybrid, and their endearingly uninhibited front man, Casey Shea, puts them right in the tradition of vaudevillian showmanship. With the singer-songwriter **Matt Singer.** Jan. 26-27: The fierce and uncompromising guitarist and singer **Toshi Reagon** celebrates her birthday, and the tenth anniversary of her band, Big Lovely. Jan. 28: Reagon returns with her band for a show of sacred music, accompanied by her mother, **Bernice Johnson Reagon,** the founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock. Jan. 29: The high-octane guitarist **Bill Kirchen** (whose playing in the early seventies propelled Commander Cody and His Lost Planet Airmen's single "Hot Rod Lincoln" straight into the pantheon of outlaw country songs) serves up songs from his new album, "Hammer of the Honky-Tonk Gods."

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Jan. 25: The blue-collar rocker and FM-radio staple **Bob Seger** returns with his Silver Bullet Band.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Jan. 24: **The Cold War Kids,** from Los Angeles, finish up the New York City leg of their bi-coastal residency. Jan. 26: A night of rock *en español* (and *en français*) with the beloved local acts the **Cuban Cowboys, Pistolera,** and **Les Sans Culottes.** Jan. 29: **Peter Bjorn and John** (see the Bowery Ballroom).

SYMPHONY SPACE
Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Jan. 26: The adventurous collaborative **Tin Hat**—which started as a trio ten years ago and morphed into a quintet following the departure in 2004 of one of its founding members—celebrates the release of its latest album, "The Sad Machinery of Spring." The record offers up a classical- and jazz-inflected soundtrack of sorts for the fantastical, dreamscape-laden writings and drawings of the Polish Jewish author and artist Bruno Schulz. The band here comprises the original members Carla Kihlstedt (on violin and vocals) and Mark Orton (on guitar, Dobro, and banjo), along with Ara Anderson (trumpet and pump organ) and Ben Goldberg (saxophones).

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Jan 28: **Polly Cotton** is a collaboration between the vocalist Shelley Hirsch, an East New York native, and the Swiss composer and keyboardist Simon Ho, who writes playful, theatrical tunes to back her up. Hirsch, who's been a downtown icon since the seventies, delivers funny and sometimes poignant autobiographical narratives about everything from a gay Egyptian gynecologist to a hitchhiking trip in Germany in 1972. Ho's eclectic waltzes, Weill-ish cabaret figures, and oompahs (and the band's versatile pros on viola, cello, and tuba) are ideal complements to Hirsch's vocals, which can move quickly from a hushed, spoken riff to a beguiling wail.

UNION HALL
702 Union St., Park Slope, Brooklyn (718-638-4400)—Jan. 25: **Dean & Britta.** Dean Wareham and Britta Phillips, former indie-rock royalty (he was the founder of Luna; she joined later on bass), have a collection of late-night love songs, "L'Avventura." Their new record, "Back Numbers," which is due out next month, continues in the same vein.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Jan. 27: The **Books** are the guitarist Nick Zammuto and the classically trained cellist Paul de Jong. The two share a wide

PATRICK LONG

range of interests—avant-garde classical music, folk, and pop—but what really binds them is a passion for found sounds. (They spend a fair amount of time wandering around with microphones and tape recorders.) They cut and paste these elements into sonic delights that come across like disembodied sound sculptures. The pair tour with video projections of (what else?) snippets of old home movies from thrift shops.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
The music and dance ensemble **Ologundê** is based in New York City, but its leader, the percussionist Dendê (of the band Timbalada), and its sound are straight out of Brazil. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. For more information, call 212-545-7536. Jan. 26.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through Feb. 10: **Maude Maggart,** the sister of the pop star Fiona Apple, is carving out her own niche as a sultry and sweet-voiced cabaret artist.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Jan. 23-28: **Bill Evans Soulgrass Special Edition.** The union of jazz and bluegrass has been attempted before, but only with occasional success. The saxophonist Evans, a musical associate of Miles Davis during the eighties, gives it another shot, bringing together such topnotch pickers as the mandolinist **Sam Bush** and the banjo player **Tony Trishka,** along with a pair of A-list fusion players, the bassist **Richard Bona** and the drummer **Dave Weckl.**

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Jan. 23-24: **Jimmy Cobb's Mob.** The leader, the only surviving member of the recording band behind Miles Davis's eternally popular album "Kind of Blue," is a self-effacing drummer who incarnates swing. He's joined by **Eric Alexander,** a well-versed neo-hard-bop saxophonist who thrives on Cobb's buoyant beat. Jan. 25-28: Jazz vibraphone owes its existence to Lionel Hampton, who made the instrument swing back in the thirties. **Roy Ayers,** the hard-bop vibes player who metamorphosed into an unlikely R. & B. star, with seventies classics like "Everybody Loves the Sunshine," pays tribute to the Master.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Jan. 24-28: The **James (Blood) Ulmer Group.** The edgy guitarist is joined by the Chicago keyboardist and singer **Amina Claudine Meyers,** the drummer **Aubrey Dale,** and, on Friday and Saturday only, the dynamic baritone saxophonist **Hamiet Bluiett.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Jan. 26-27: **"Bebop Lives!"** Both **James Moody** and **Charles McPherson** have evolved as jazz itself has grown, but neither saxophonist has lost sight of his bop roots. These exemplars of the genre are joined by the younger trumpeter **Roy Hargrove** and the Italian vocalist **Roberta Gambarini.**

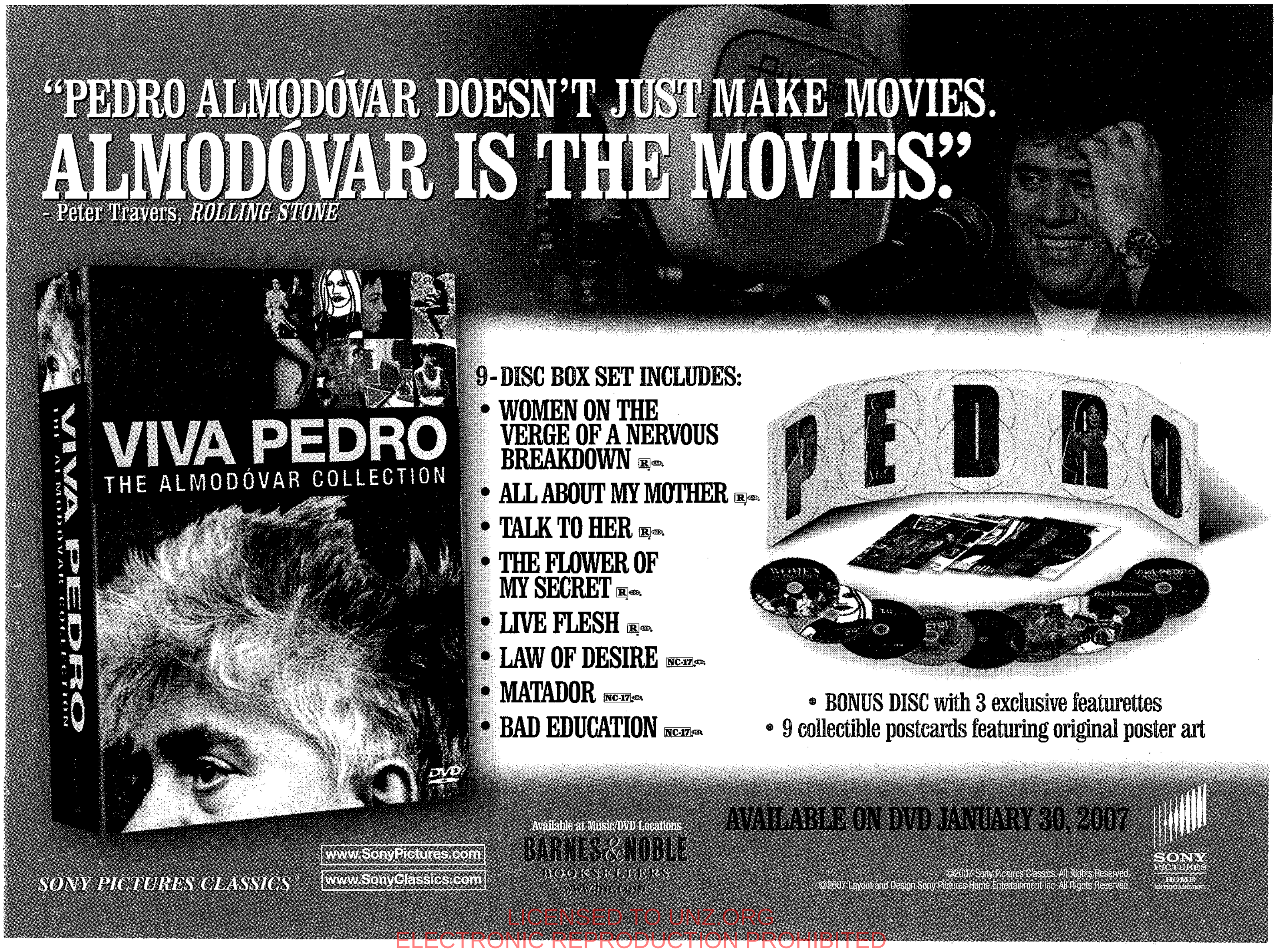
JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—The trumpeter **Ralph Alessi** is a master improviser, and, as a composer, he skates the territories of mainstream jazz, free jazz, classical, and pop. On Jan. 26-27, he celebrates the release of "Look," his new album. Joining him here are the saxophonist **Tony Malaby,** the pianist **Andy Milne,** the bassist **Drew Gress,** and the drummer **Mark Ferber.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Jan. 25-28: A bandleader dedicated to continual change, the saxophonist **Greg Osby** has put together a new ensemble, the Organization, featuring the Philadelphia-based keyboardist and singer **Trudy Pitts.**

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—Jan. 26: Last year, the cornettist **Warren Vaché** delivered what may well be his masterpiece, the album "Don't Look Back." The string section that heightened the drama of that release may be missing here, but Vaché's gorgeous tone and melodic phrasing make each of his appearances a lesson in the art of swinging horn playing.

THE STONE
Ave. C at 2nd St. (No phone)—Jan. 27: **Cassandra Wilson,** a Grammy-winning jazz and blues vocalist, gets support from a number of heavyweights, including the saxophonist **Steve Coleman,** the pianist **Jason Moran,** and the drummer **Dafnis Prieto.** (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—The bassist Kermit Driscoll, who's played with everyone from Chet Baker and Ben E. King to Don Byron and the New York Philharmonic, was recently diagnosed as having late-stage Lyme disease and is saddled with debt. On Jan. 29, **Bill Frisell's 585 Quartet** (Driscoll was a key member of the guitarist's band for about a decade, starting in the mid-eighties), the saxophonist **John Zorn,** the bassist **John Patitucci,** and **Refuge Trio** (the vocalist **Theo Bleckmann,** the drummer **John Hollenbeck,** and the keyboardist **Gary Versace**) take the stage to help him pay his medical bills.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ALMODÓVAR IS THE MOVIES."
- Peter Travers, *ROLLING STONE*

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VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Jan. 23-28: The **Bad Plus**—the pianist **Ethan Iverson**, the bassist **Reid Anderson**, and the drummer **David King**—haven't turned out to be the future of jazz. But the three still have plenty of tricks up their sleeves, and their canny originals are of more enduring interest than the rock adaptations that gained them fame. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s"** features work by ten Weimar-era artists, including Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Ludwig Meidner. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Americans in Paris, 1860-1900,"** an enjoyable show of questing Yankees abroad, among them Whistler, Cassatt, Sargent, Homer, and Eakins. Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Nan Kempner: American Chic."** Through March 4. ♦ **"Coaxing the Spirits to Dance: Art of the Papuan Gulf."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—The city that never sleeps is the setting, and partly the subject, of the multimedia artist Doug Aitken's first U.S. public project, **"Sleepwalkers."** A series of moving pictures depicting five different characters—an office worker (played by Tilda Swinton), a businessman (Donald Sutherland), an electrician (Seu Jorge), a postal worker (Chan Marshall), and a bike messenger (Ryan Donowho)—making their way through New York is projected onto the museum's exterior walls. Through Feb. 12, nightly from 5 to 10. ♦ **"Manet and the Execution of Maximilian."** Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"OMA in Beijing: China Central Television Headquarters by Rem Koolhaas and Ole Scheeren."** Through Feb. 26. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Tatyana Grosman founded the U.L.A.E. workshop on Long Island in 1957; in the years since, hundreds of artists—among them Susan Rothenberg, Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, Kiki Smith, and Richard Tuttle—have made prints with the master craftsmen there. Through April 9. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory"** includes works by Zurbarán, Murillo, Velázquez, and Cotán, among many others. Through March 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Kiki Smith: A Gathering, 1980-2005."** Through Feb. 11. ♦ **"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Photography and the Self: The Legacy of F. Holland Day."** Through March 11. ♦ Terence Koh has his first solo museum show in the U.S., an installation in the museum's lobby. Through May 27. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM AT ALTRIA
120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (917-663-2453)—**"Burgeoning Geometries"** includes work by Diana Cooper, Jane South, Phoebe Washburn, Charles Goldman, Jason Rogenes, and Tara Donovan. Through March 4. (Open Mondays through Fridays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Tigers of Wrath: Watercolors by Walton Ford."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Ron Mueck."** Through Feb. 4. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM
45 W. 53rd St. (212-265-1040)—**"Martín Ramírez."** Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10:30 to 5:30, and until 7:30 on Fridays.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alex Katz Paints Ada."** Through March 18. ♦ **"Masters of American Comics"** and **"Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics."** Through Jan. 28. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"A City on Paper: Saul Steinberg's New York."** The "Draftsman Laureate of New York" is what curators have dubbed Steinberg here, and his whimsical, idiosyncratic maps and drawings of New York monuments—including fond renderings of its quirky denizens—bear that out. A typical day for Steinberg included a stroll through the city to feed his imagination. Even so, a colored-pencil drawing like "Leon Trotsky Has Apple Pie and Tea at the Automat on Broadway at 47th Street, Jan 28, 1917" (1983) catches you off guard. It turns out that Trotsky was in New York for three months in 1917. But did he like apple pie? Much of Steinberg's work functions this way, merging bits of history and real-life experience into delightful, well-drafted puzzles. Through March 25. ♦ **"Black Style Now."** Through Feb. 19. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM
222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—**"Crossroads: Modernism in Ukraine 1910-1930."** The curators of this show would like to make an announcement: Some of the art you previously assumed was Russian may actually be Ukrainian. Archipenko? Ukrainian. Malevich? Ukrainian. More than seventy works never exhibited in this country, by twenty-one artists, are included along with texts describing links between traditions as seemingly disparate as modern abstraction and Ukrainian folk art. In addition to painting and sculpture, "Crossroads" includes objects like gouaches for costume designs for the Puccini opera "Turandot" and examples of Constructivist graphics. Perhaps most surprising is the riot of color on view, although one might need it to get through those winters in Kiev. Through March 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

DEBBIE FLEMING CAFFERY
Caffery's brand of engaged, impressionistic humanism is currently so out of fashion it looks almost radical. She photographs farm workers in Louisiana, prostitutes in Mexico, children wherever she finds them, and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina with a kind of tender care that never feels sentimental or familiar. Like Roy DeCarava, she tends to work best in the dark, and many of her subjects in this smartly edited thirty-year survey dissolve into or emerge from shadows and fog. This fuels a rich aura of Southern surrealism in the Clarence John Laughlin mode—the sense that myths are nurtured but also die here. Through Feb. 24. (Gitterman, 170 E. 75th St. 212-734-0868.)

TABLES FOR TWO
BAR MARTIGNETTI

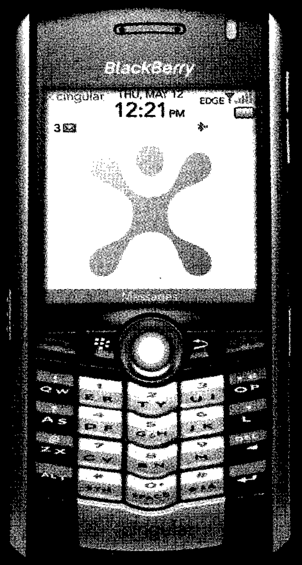
406 Broome St. (212-680-5600)—Tom and Anthony Martignetti, brothers and owners of a club on Houston Street, have said that they intended, with this restaurant, to create an Odeon for Nolita's young and well-heeled. They have produced a brasserie that seems—from the pressed-tin ceiling to the tea-towel napkins—so generic that you start to suspect some sort of sophisticated in-joke. The venue is perfectly pitched to a late-twenties crowd that seems as standardized as the setting. He: financial services, gym, bed head, shirt undone to second button, a beer, steak frites. She: publicity, tanning bed, "blond," chunky belt slung to one side, specialty cocktail, chicken salad.

Up to a point, it doesn't matter much what the cooking is like. Certainly, if you order one of the obvious standards of the bistro menu, you can get the boring dish you deserve. The steak frites is on the stringy side, the mussels decent but average, and the filet-mignon dish spoils a nice cut of meat with a needless dollop of blue cheese. The surprise comes in the fact that the chef, Lonnie ("I haven't asked his second name," a waiter said. "He scares me."), is capable of real excellence, with some well-executed dishes tucked into corners of the menu where they won't be noticed. A pork chop, thick and laden with caramelized onions and cabbage, has a deep, rich taste that makes you think of berries. A skate fillet, nicely offset by maitake mushrooms and barely sautéed Brussels sprouts, comes on a base of cauliflower whipped to a gel-like consistency. The desserts, though, are underwhelming, with pastry crusts the texture of flowerpots. And even some of the better options—a squash-soup special, say—stick, not very inventively, to the sweet end of the taste spectrum.

The Martignetti brothers have opened a bar and lounge named Belgrade beneath the restaurant, which means that the sceney aspect of the experience will only get worse. It's best to come early and have a really good meal when the place is empty. By midnight or so, there is a fine post-collegiate hum of people snapping each other with camera phones and texting friends. It's the sort of atmosphere where the following exchange is possible. Waiter: "How were your frites, on a scale of one to ten?" Dude: "Awesome!" (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $14-$29.)

—*Leo Carey*

LIZ LARNER
Larner's outdoor sculpture, a large-scale formal study of a morphing sphere and cube, can function as a sort of post-holiday Rorschach test, gauging the winter moods of art viewers. A friendly eye might enjoy it as a playful cross between a U.F.O. and a hot rod, sheathed in high-tech iridescent-green paint and dropped into the little plaza at Central Park's southeast corner like a jewel-shaped version of the monolith in "2001" (from which the piece takes its name). To the less charitably minded, it could look like a



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giant, computer-generated Christmas-tree bauble, better suited to a slowly revolving platform at a trade show. Through May 1. (Doris C. Freedman Plaza, Fifth Ave. at 60th St. For information, visit www.publicartfund.org.)

IRVING PENN
A collection of photographs of flowers, dating from 1967 to 2006. Through Feb. 17. (Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999.)

Irving Penn's "Lavender Glory Poppy, New York" (1968), at Pace/MacGill.

© 1980 IRVING PENN, COURTESY OF VOGUE

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JONAS MEKAS
Mekas's cinematic documents lie somewhere between avant-garde films and home movies—that is, a home where cultural luminaries like Yoko Ono, George Plimpton, Allen Ginsberg, and Timothy Leary just happened to stop by. The sixties and early seventies feel more intimate here, brought to life in grainy images of Andy Warhol working or the Velvet Underground playing their first gig; Salvador Dali chatting for the camera or Elia Kazan in Montauk. Ten L.C.D. monitors provide hours of curated footage; projected works appear in an adjacent gallery. For those who can't get enough—or like their films delivered in the latest format—Mekas has turned digital, uploading his older films and more recent work onto his eponymous Web site. Through Feb. 10. (Stendhal, 545 W. 20th St. 212-366-1549.)

ANDREW MOORE
Moore, a photographer best known for his color images of Cuban and Russian façades and interiors in states of spectacular decay, steps back for a much wider view with a show of large landscape vistas. Although there's something charmingly old-school about Moore's stunning pictures of a North Dakota cattle roundup under a postcard-perfect sky and a public plaza in Kiev dominated by "Motherland," a massive statue of a warrior, the dazzle of other shots appears to have been deliberately dimmed. A fishing village on the White Sea is seen from a debris-filled beach at low tide, and Hanoi sits in the smog across a bay whose ragged edge looks like Bayonne. Through Jan. 27. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

ADI NES
Nes, an Israeli photographer whose staged images of military and civilian life have often taken an insinuating homoerotic turn, shows twelve big color pieces from his new "Biblical Stories" series. Nes situates his protagonists in down-and-out contemporary settings: a grizzled, grimy Noah sprawls naked next to a bank of video vending machines; Jacob and Esau meet across a table in a soup kitchen; Ruth and Naomi gather onions from the trash of a disbanded open-air market. Not all of this works, but the best pictures are surprisingly moving and full of painterly references. Narratives of betrayal and bereavement are deftly summed up in a gesture, a look, or a crumpled body on a stone bench. Through Feb. 3. (Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 212-645-1701.)

"PRIMITIVISM REVISITED: AFTER THE END OF AN IDEA"
More than twenty years have passed since William Rubin mounted the controversial exhibition "Primitivism in the Twentieth Century" at MOMA, in 1984. Susan Vogel, a professor of African art at Columbia, and her students revisit the subject to ascertain whether it really is "after the end of an idea." This time, Picasso and Gauguin are left out, and contemporary artists like Yinka Shonibare, Carolee Schneemann, Adam Fuss, Gabriel Orozco, Sarah Lucas, and Alfredo Jaar are shown alongside ethnographic and "tourist" art from Africa. The show is uneven, and headings like "Manufacturing Authenticity," "Constructing Culture," and "Imagining Another" sound at least a decade past their expiration dates. Nonetheless, the show provides something to chew on, if not a definitive revision of Rubin's project. Through Jan. 27. (Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181.)

Short List

ROZ CHAST: Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Feb. 10. **JACK HALLBERG / MIGUEL LUCIANO:** Cue, 511 W. 25th St. 212-206-3583. Through Jan. 27. **ROBERT IRWIN:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-929-7000. Through Jan. 27. **ELLSWORTH KELLY:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St., 522 W. 22nd St., and 526 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200. Through Jan. 27. **JENNY PERLIN / PETER WELZ:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Feb. 10. **SERGIO PREGO:** Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through Feb. 10. **JOHN WESLEY:** Fredericks & Freiser, 536 W. 24th St. 212-633-6555. Through Feb. 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

LEESA AND NICOLE ABAHUNI
A curtain of fine-gauge beaded chain, suspended from an undulating metallic blanket on the ceiling, greets the entrant into the Abahuni twins' installation "In the Sky." If this is the sky, presumably the chain is rain, and to call it a curtain misses its sculptural dimensionality, since the strands half-fill the gallery. Pushing through these chilly tendrils would be more fun if (a) there were no empty space, and that monotonous-lovely extension were the point, or (b) one arrived at something exciting beyond the barrier. Instead, the eventual clearing presents a simple column of twisted red cloth, and a hard-to-read video of hands at work on a tapestry. Through Jan. 27. (Location One, 26 Greene St. 212-334-3347.)

HORST
Horst, whose rigorous, refined work for *Vogue* began in the early nineteen-thirties and lasted nearly until his death, in 1999, was a fashion photographer in the broadest sense. This exhibition, celebrating the centennial of his birth, includes portraits, still-lifes, nudes, and flower studies, as well as pictures of women in extraordinary clothes (most famously, perhaps, a lace-up Mainbocher corset that Horst rendered as iconic as a shard of classical sculpture). With vintage prints from the photographer's personal collection, the work here goes well beyond his greatest hits to indicate the full range of his subjects (Gertrude Stein, Elsa Schiaparelli, Andy Warhol, tulips, stockings, plaster busts) and the remarkable durability of his style. Through Jan. 27. (Staley Wise, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-6223.)

Short List

RYAN MCGINLEY: Team, 83 Grand St. 212-279-9219. Through Feb. 10. **"CLIP, STAMP, FOLD: THE RADICAL ARCHITECTURE OF LITTLE MAGAZINES, 196X-197X":** Storefront for Art and Architecture, 97 Kenmare St. 212-431-5795. Through Jan. 31.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Without the urging (and backing) of Lincoln Kirstein, Balanchine might never have come to America, and American ballet as we know it

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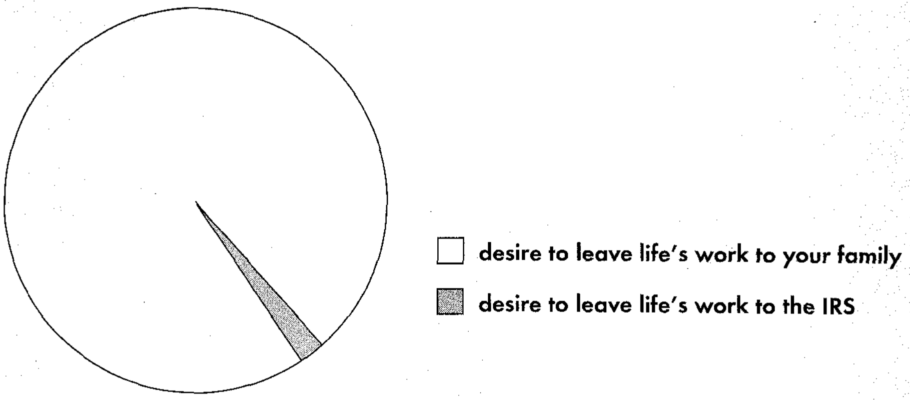
YOUR LEGACY



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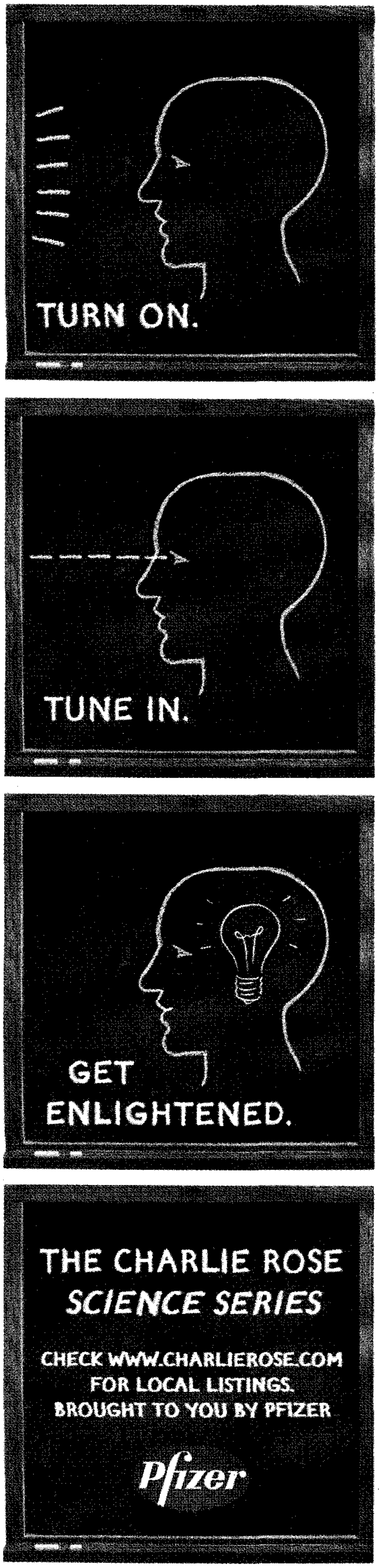

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would not have seen the light of day. This is the centenary of Kirstein's birth, and the company he helped to create is marking this milestone in various ways, including a program that will be performed for the first time this Saturday. On the bill are "Episodes," Mr. B.'s stark, geometric work set to Webern; the lushly romantic "Vienna Waltzes"; and a tribute to Kirstein (and Balanchine) by the former City Ballet danseur Christopher d'Amboise. ♦ Jan. 24 at 7:30: "2 and 3 Part Inventions," "A Suite of Dances," "In Memory of . . .," and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ Jan. 25 at 8 and Jan. 28 at 3: "Agon," "Monumentum pro Gesualdo," "Movements for Piano and Orchestra," "Duo Concertant," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ Jan. 26 at 8: "Mozartiana," "In Vento," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." ♦ Jan. 27 at 2: "Carousel (A Dance)," "Tarantella," "Symphony in Three Movements," and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ Jan. 27 at 8: "Episodes," "Tribute" (N.Y.C.B. première), and "Vienna Waltzes." ♦ Jan. 30 at 7:30: "Square Dance," "Liebeslieder Walzer," and "Stars and Stripes." (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Through Feb. 25.)

SUSAN MARSHALL AND COMPANY
Dance Theatre Workshop offers a second look at last year's much praised "Cloudless," an evening of focussed vignettes set to snippets of mostly melancholy tunes. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Jan. 22-23, Jan. 25-27, and Jan. 30 at 7:30. Through Feb. 3.)

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP
The company presents a program that includes a new work by Morris set to Bach's "Italian Concerto." (Mark Morris Dance Center, 3 Lafayette Ave, Brooklyn. 212-352-3101. Jan. 23-27 at 7:30.)

ASPEN SANTA FE BALLET
The dynamic young company returns to the Joyce for a weeklong engagement, where it will be performing two local premières: "It's Not About the Numbers," a sculptural piece by Nicolo Fonte, and "Pointeoff," another highly complex, twitchy work by the Finnish wunderkind Jorma Elo. Elo's hyperactivity is counterbalanced by the harmony of Twyla Tharp's "Sweet Fields," inspired by the Shakers. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 23-24 at 7:30, Jan. 25-26 at 8, Jan. 27 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 28 at 2.)

TANGO X 2
The famed choreographer-dancer Miguel Ángel Zotto returns to New York with "Su Historia," a show about the history of his troupe that's also a greatest-hits collection of his choreography. A fedora-wearing angel serves as host, providing context for each of the dance numbers. There's not much of a story, but the slight frame supports a range of emotion and style that's unusual for a tango show. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Jan. 24-26 at 8, Jan. 27 at 2 and 8, and Jan. 28 at 2 and 6.)

COOL NEW YORK 2007 DANCE FESTIVAL
The White Wave dance company hosts another enterprising dance smorgasbord at the company's DUMBO headquarters. The two-week festival offers five programs of short performances by more than sixty companies, from the very new to the more established. Tickets are free, though donations are encouraged. (John Ryan Theatre, 25 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-855-8822. Jan. 24-Feb. 4. For a full schedule, visit www.whitewavedance.com.)

"SHOWPONY"
The experimental choreographer Trajal Harrell explores the performing life in a series of simultaneous but distinct postmodern solos for himself and two women. Moving down a runway lined with forty-odd chairs, the dancers perform arm-driven movements and sultry come-ons, shifting between natural and stylized versions of themselves. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, 131 E. 10th St., at Second Ave. 212-674-8194. Jan. 25-27 at 8:30 and Jan. 28 at 7:30.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MUSICAL CHAIR

In 2003, when twenty-five-year-old Ryan McGinley became the youngest artist to have a solo début at the Whitney, there was every reason

to think that he'd be a flash in the pan. The big color photographs of friends and lovers he showed then were made under the heady influence of Wolfgang Tillmans, Nan Goldin, and Larry Clark; without them, one feared, he was nothing. Instead, McGinley has not only proved himself to be as resilient as his idols, he's also gone on to have an influence all his own. His loose, sensuous, exhilarating style is one of the most imitated around, but few can strike his seemingly effortless balance between finesse and immediacy. If that balance tilts toward hectic spontaneity in his new pictures at Team, it's not just appropriate but inevitable. McGinley took these grainy, overexposed shots at Morrissey concerts, and he's just as excited by the singer's fans as he is by their charismatic idol. Roiling crowds and ecstatic individuals are bathed in magenta, yellow, green, and blue stage light, like devotees at a psychedelic shrine. McGinley's camera swoons and sweats. He lets himself get carried away but never forgets to take us with him.

—*Vince Aletti*

RYAN MCGINLEY

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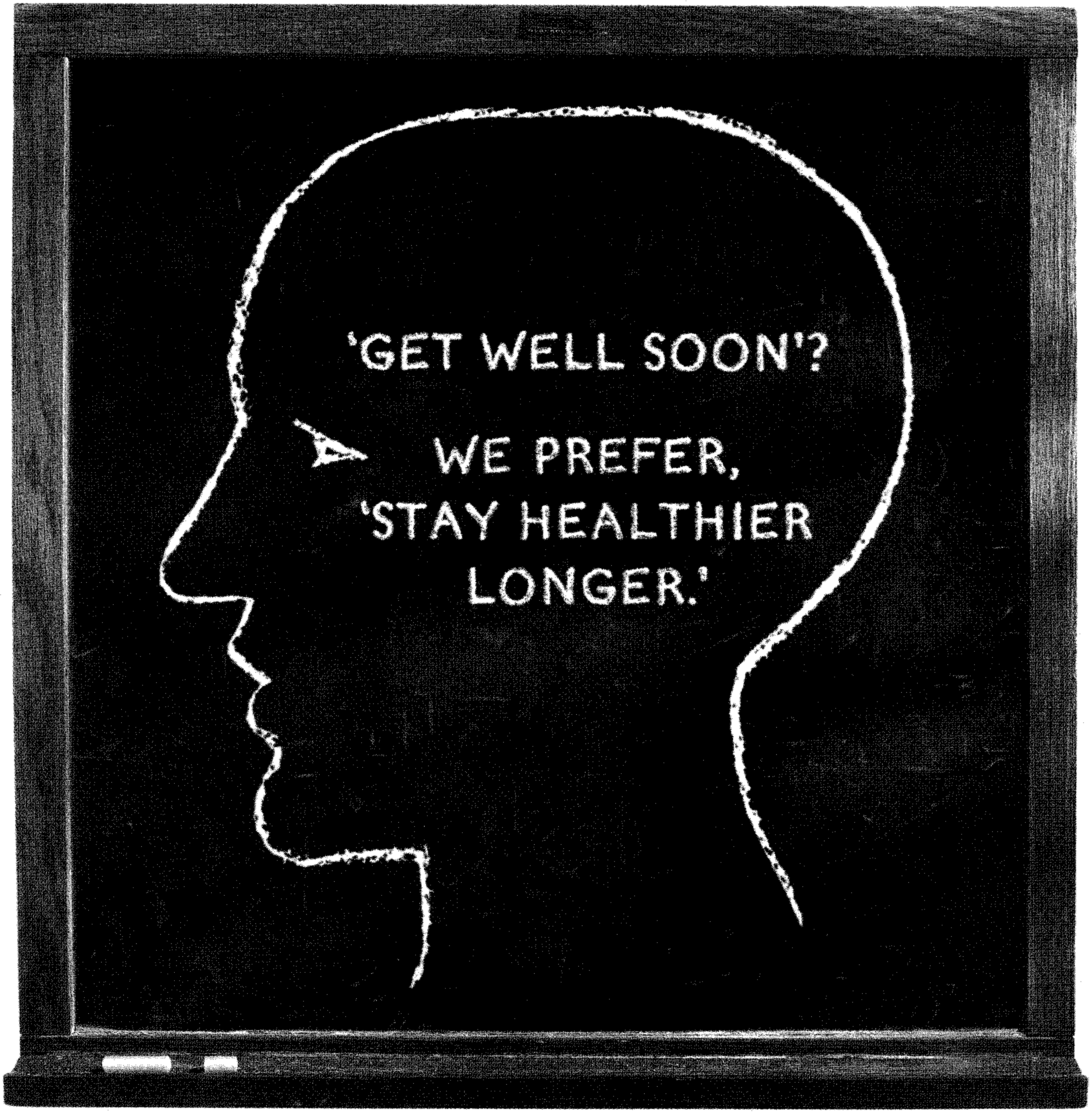

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ANDREA DEL CONTE DANZA ESPAÑA
Del Conte and her New York-based dancers are joined by guitarists and *cantaores* from the group "Gazpacho Andalú" and a guest dancer from Spain (Marco de Ana). Together, they weave a blend of traditional flamenco with more contemporary, "choreographed" styles. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. Jan. 25-28 at 8.)

OLOGUNDÊ
The music-and-dance ensemble Ologundê is based in New York, but its heart lies in Bahia, Brazil. The troupe's rough-edged presentation of the syncretic rituals of candomblé and *maculelê* may strike the uninitiated as lacklustre. Not so the acrobatics of capoeira—performed both in fluid slow motion and in fast-forward frenzy. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 26 at 8.)

CEDAR LAKE CONTEMPORARY BALLET
The company's season continues at its Chelsea home. (547 W. 26th St. 212-868-4444. Jan. 26-27 at 8.)

ANTONIETTA VICARIO MAKES DANCES
What Vicario's "I cannot escape being me so that is what I will show you" shows us is three women taking off their shoes, socks, and pants and adopting sexual but static poses in their underwear. The posing accelerates, slowly, into a thrashing maelstrom, in an exploration of the space between demure and demonic. (Dance New Amsterdam, 280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. Jan. 26-27 at 8 and Jan. 28 at 3.)

"Blood and Chocolate," starring Agnes Bruckner as a lycanthrope, opens Jan. 26.

TAMAR ROGOFF PERFORMANCE PROJECTS
In 1989 and 1990, two eleven-year-old friends made their film débuts: the movie star Claire Danes and Ariel Rogoff Flavin, now a social worker. Tamar Rogoff (Ariel's mother) reunites the two in "Edith & Jenny," a movement piece that imagines a friendship between the unhappy characters the girls portrayed in their first films. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 26 and Jan. 30 at 8, Jan. 27 at 5 and 8, and Jan. 28 at 5. Through Feb. 4.)

SING SING RHYTHMS/FULA FLUTE ENSEMBLE
Named after the Senegalese master drummer Sing Sing Faye—not the prison—this troupe performs the polyrhythmic drumming of the Wolof people and the stamping and leaping *sabar* dances that go with it. The company shares a program with the Fula Flute Ensemble, led by the master flutist Bailo Bah. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 27 at 8.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
The chamber company will perform its child-friendly "Mother Goose," a suite of witty interpretations of nursery rhymes set to a lively piano-four-hands score. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-355-6160. Jan. 27-28 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30.)

JULIE ATLAS MUZ
The intelligent, bawdy burlesque star has created her first evening-length solo, "Divine Comedy of an Exquisite Corpse," with elements of ballet and mime and, of course, some bare skin. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Jan. 27-28 at 8:30. Through Feb. 11.)

"WORKS AND PROCESS"
The Guggenheim's intimate series of performance-and-discussion evenings focusses this week on the American Ballet Theatre's revival of Lar Lubovitch's turbulent "Othello," from 1997, a feature of its spring season. Dancers will include David Hallberg in the role of the Moor, and the panelists will be Lubovitch and the company's artistic director, Kevin McKenzie. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3587. Jan. 28-29 at 7:30.)

"RAINER VARIATIONS"
Charles Atlas's portrait in film of the Judson Church pioneer and experimental filmmaker Yvonne Rainer mixes interview, rehearsal, and performance footage with reënactments by the actress Kathleen Chalfant and the dancer Richard Move. Atlas's affectionate montage headlines a MOMA program that also includes three early Rainer films: "Trio A," "Line," and "Trio Film." (11 W. 53rd St. 212-708-9490. Jan. 29 at 6.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Carlo Rizzi conducts Puccini's **"La Bohème,"** in the grandiloquent, crowd-drawing Zeffirelli production; singing are the impressive Cristina Gallardo-Domâs and Marcello Giordani, as Mimì and Rodolfo, and Ainhoa Arteta and Dwayne Croft, as Musetta and Marcello. (Jan. 24 at 7:30.) ♦ With Elena Evseeva replacing Gallardo-Domâs. (Jan. 27 at 8.) ♦ Plácido Domingo sings the title role of Tan Dun's **"The First Emperor,"** an epic tale of ancient China, directed by the imaginative martial-arts auteur Zhang Yimou. Also with Sarah Coburn, Ning Lang, and Marc Heller; Tan, an experienced and incisive conductor, is on the podium. (Jan. 25 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ A Zeffirelli week continues with a revival of his production of the classic verist double bill, **"Cavalleria Rusticana"** and **"Pagliacci."** Such a pairing may be routine, but the Met's cast is not—the first features such singers as Dolora Zajick, Frank Porretta (in his Met début), and Mark Delavan, while the second boasts Krassimira Stoyanova, Salvatore Licitra, and Lado Ataneli in the leading roles; Marco Armiliato. (Jan. 26 at 8 and Jan. 30 at 7:30.) ♦ A revival of the durable Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Wookyong Kim, and Charles Taylor in the leading roles; Carlo Rizzi. (Jan. 27 at 1:30.) ♦ Karita Mattila may be best known to Met audiences for her searing portrayal of Strauss's Salome, but her rendition of the title role of Janáček's **"Jenůfa"** is equally distinctive. The Olivier Tambosi production is static and dull, but it's easily transcended by the interpretive powers of Mattila and the formidable Anja Silja, who takes the role of Kostelnicka; Jiří Belohlávek, a renowned Czech master, conducts. (Jan. 29 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

GOTHAM CHAMBER OPERA: "IL SIGNOR BRUSCHINO"
Neal Goren's hardy company only stages one production each season, always brought off with élan and expertise. This year, the director Robin Guarino will bring a Felliniesque atmosphere to Rossini's eighty-minute comedy, setting the work in the nineteen-sixties Rome of "La Dolce Vita." (Harry de Jur Playhouse, 466 Grand St. 212-279-4200. Jan. 25 at 7:30; Jan. 28 at 2; and Jan. 30, Feb. 1, and Feb. 3 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Like Mahler, Giuseppe Martucci, his contemporary, pursued a distinguished conducting career (which included the Italian première of "Tristan und Isolde") while devoting himself intently to symphonic composition. Riccardo Muti, a longtime champion, conducts Martucci's very Brahmsian Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Gerhard Oppitz) in a program that also includes Verdi's Ballet Music from "Macbeth" and Respighi's "Feste Romane." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Jan. 25 at 7:30 and Jan. 26-27 at 8.)

MOSCOW SOLOISTS
Yuri Bashmet, an incandescent viola virtuoso and a proud advocate of the best contemporary composers, brings his young string orchestra to Carnegie Hall for a pair of concerts. Jan. 25 at 7:30: Two evocative works by Takemitsu (including "Three Film Scores") frame music by Hikaru Hayashi and Tan Dun (the Concerto for String Orchestra and Pipa, with Wu Man, a stunning technician and a charismatic presence, as soloist). (Zankel Hall.) ♦ Jan. 28 at 2: Works for viola and strings (by Schnittke and Britten) are at the core of a grander concert that begins and ends with Mahler's arrangements of quartets by Beethoven (the F Minor, "Serioso") and Schubert ("Death and the Maiden"). (Stern Auditorium.)

OBERLIN CONSERVATORY ORCHESTRA
Oberlin has trained some of America's best orchestral musicians for decades, but it took Robert Spano's presence as its orchestra's conductor (before he moved on to such greener pastures as the Atlanta Symphony) to give the group a larger profile. Ever loyal, he brings it to Carnegie Hall to perform music by Bartók (the Concerto for Orchestra), Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 25 in C Major, with Pedja Muzijevic), and his longtime colleague Jennifer Higdon. (212-247-7800. Jan. 26 at 8.)

HAMBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Andrey Boreyko leads the German ensemble in its New York début at the Metropolitan Museum, performing Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" Overture, Brahms's Second Symphony, and the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto (with Robert McDuffie). (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Jan. 26 at 8.)

RECITALS

"DECASIA"
Michael Gordon's electrifying symphony—accompanied by a haunting film, assembled from decaying film stock, by Bill Morrison—premièred in 2001, with the orchestra standing on a triangular pyramid three tiers high. The work returns, mounted now amid the atmospheric gloom of the Angel Orensanz Center, performed by the Manhattan School of Music's contemporary-music ensemble, Tactus. (172 Norfolk St. For tickets, visit www.theatermania.com. Jan. 25-27 at 7 and 9:30.)

JOHN RITTER

"THE COMPOSERS PROJECT": JOHN CORIGLIANO
The richly expressive soprano Amy Burton and the indefatigable new-music pianist Stephen Gosling should rise to the challenge of performing "Mr. Tambourine Man," Corigliano's powerful settings of lyrics from seven classic Bob Dylan songs. (Thalia Theatre, Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 25 at 7:30.)

"THE SONG CONTINUES"
Few divas have had as active a retirement as Marilyn Horne, who works with the foundation bearing her name to train and inspire a new generation of American singers. Her educational residency at Carnegie Hall concludes with an official concert, in which the tenor Marcello Giordani shares the stage with such promising young singers as the mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and the baritone Andrew Garland. (They are accompanied by the estimable Warren Jones, among others.) This year's theme is "Gypsy in My Soul," a program featuring appealing works by Rossini, Brahms, and Turina along with new songs by Gabriela Lena Frank. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 26 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Rounding out a rich weekend at the barge, the fine Amernet String Quartet offers the New York première of Russell Platt's Quintet for Bassoon and Strings (with Peter Kolkay) along with Grieg's robust String Quartet in G Minor and Mozart's Quartet in D Major, K. 575. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Jan. 27 at 7:30 and Jan. 28 at 4. For a complete listing of concerts, see www.bargemusic.org.)

VOX VOCAL ENSEMBLE
George Steel's group, known for its erudite interpretations of Renaissance music, turns to a collection of Tudor-era settings of Holy Week texts drawn from the Lamentations of Jeremiah; along with the best of Thomas Tallis, the program features reconstructions of Robert White's "Lamentations à 6" and John Mundy's little-known "De Lamentatione." (Church of St. Mary the Virgin, 145 W. 46th St. 212-854-7799. Jan. 27 at 8.)

GARRICK OHLSSON
The American pianist, renowned for his intelligence, wit, and athletic technique, begins a survey of the Beethoven piano sonatas at Alice Tully Hall; his first foray includes the "Pathétique" and "Appassionata" Sonatas. (212-721-6500. Jan. 28 at 2.)

"REMEMBERING LIGETI"
The Hungarian composer, who died last year at the age of eighty-three, will long be remembered throughout the worlds of music and film for his innovative orchestral compositions and choral arrangements; unfamiliar to many are the three works—all of them gorgeous and daunting—that he created for the organ. John Scott, the organist and director of music at St. Thomas Church, opens a two-part Organ Festival (sponsored by Miller Theatre) with a Ligeti retrospective, along with companion works by Jonathan Harvey. (Fifth Ave. at 53rd St. Jan 28 at 5:15. No tickets required.)

"THE MOVADO HOUR": ST. LAWRENCE STRING QUARTET
No quartet in North America combines precision, passion, and virtuosity as convincingly as this renowned Canadian ensemble, which will bring its intense style to works by Haydn, Schumann, and Shostakovich in a salon-type concert at the Baryshnikov Arts Center; refreshments will be served a half hour before concert time. (450 W. 37th St. Jan. 29 at 7. For free tickets, which are required, call 212-218-7540.)

SUSAN GRAHAM
Graham's mezzo-soprano, so far from the dusky shadings of Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, is a voice without regrets, healthy, rounded, ineffably musical, and eager for a challenge. Malcolm Martineau accompanies her in a round of *mélodies* by such suave French masters as Debussy, Lalo, Ravel, Roussel, and Poulenc (the flamboyant "La Dame de Monte Carlo"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Jan. 29 at 8.)

SPECULUM MUSICAE
The renowned modernist ensemble, not known for whimsy, loosens up a bit to perform the world première of Tom Flaherty's theatrical setting of Calvin Trillin's political satire "A Heckuva Job"; works by Richard Wernick (another première), Leon Kirchner, and Elliott Carter are also featured. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Jan. 29 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE
A horror film about a woman who must decide between living as a werewolf and loving a human. Directed by Katja von Garnier. Opening Jan. 26. (In wide release.)

BREAKING AND ENTERING
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 26. (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

CATCH AND RELEASE
Susannah Grant directed this romantic comedy, about a young widow (Jennifer Garner) who learns of her late husband's secrets. Co-starring Timothy Olyphant, Juliette Lewis, and Kevin Smith. Opening Jan. 26. (In wide release.)

EPIC MOVIE
Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer, the duo behind the "Scary Movie" franchise, take on the blockbuster. Starring Kal Penn and Fred Willard. Opening Jan. 26. (In wide release.)

FROM OTHER WORLDS
A science-fiction comedy about a Brooklyn woman whose kitchen is occupied by aliens. Starring Cara Buono and Isaach De Bankolé. Directed by Barry Strugatz. Opening Jan. 26. (Cinema Village.)

NOMAD
An adventure film set in eighteenth-century Kazakhstan, about a young man who unites the country's warring factions. Starring Kuno Becker; directed by Sergei Bodrov, Ivan Passer, and Talgat Temenov. In Kazakh. Opening Jan. 26. (Empire 25 and Village Theatre VII.)

SCREAMERS
A documentary by Carla Garapedian about the Armenian genocide in Turkey. Opening Jan. 26. (Empire 25.)

SERAPHIM FALLS
In this Western, starring Pierce Brosnan and Liam Neeson, a former colonel in the Civil War seeks revenge against a murderer. Directed by David Von Ancken. Opening Jan. 26. (42nd Street E Walk and Union Square.)

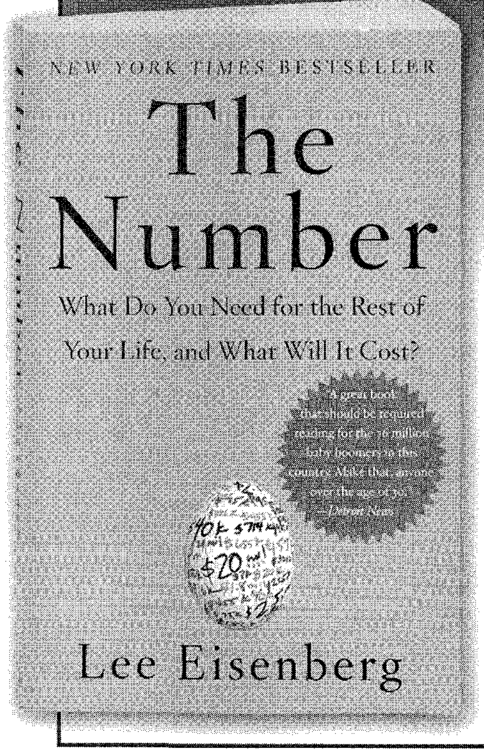
SMOKIN' ACES
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 26. (In wide release.)

2 OR 3 THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HIM
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 24. (Film Forum.)

NOW PLAYING

ABDUCTION: THE MEGUMI YOKOTA STORY
A documentary, directed by Chris Sheridan and Patty Kim, about the disappearance of a Japanese schoolgirl in 1977. If that event was baffling, its aftermath defied all reason. Twenty years or so after the kidnapping of Megumi (and that of at least a dozen other people over a six-year span), it began to emerge that the victims had essentially been stolen off the street and forced to begin new lives in North Korea. The executive producer of the film was Jane Campion, and you can sense her influence in its gathering momentum of strangeness. Anybody who expects the story of Megumi to end happily—or even to end, in any way that might console her patiently grieving parents—is heading for disillusion. On the other hand, anybody who has forgotten that suspense can co-exist with an unbearable sadness is in for a salutary shock.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 1/22/07.) (Cinema Village.)

BECKET
This faithful expansion of Jean Anouilh's play is the sort of movie usually described as an actors' duel. But what Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton do, as King Henry II and the Archbishop of Can-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terbury, Thomas Becket, respectively, is more like a duet. Anouilh concocts a juicy debate between Becket, a Kierkegaardian hero who comes to religion after a vast inner struggle, and Henry, a worldly hero who sees his former buddy Becket's disapproval of his wishes as a fatal betrayal. Burton doesn't overdo the verbal pyrotechnics: he gives the impression of energy held in check. O'Toole, on the other hand, lets everything hang out in prodigious display. He manages to convey what Henry never quite acknowledges in the script, even when his mother calls him "unnatural": that his character's attachment to Becket is, in part, homosexual. O'Toole's Henry isn't afraid to appear ludicrous. He has the strength of a self-made king—a strength momentarily shattered by Becket's conversion. More than the assassins' swords at the climax, it's Henry's desperate cries of love for his ex-friend that cut you to the quick. Directed by Peter Glenville. Released in 1964.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Jan. 26-30.)

THE BIRTH OF LOVE

This ardent, muted Parisian melodrama, from 1993, derives its power from the director Philippe Garrel's total identification with its middle-aged protagonists. Paul (Lou Castel), a paunchy, dishevelled actor, and Marcus (Jean-Pierre Léaud), a blocked writer with delusions of grandeur, are ready to sacrifice anything or anyone to their amorous impulses, every tremor of which is captured by Garrel's intimate images. The poorly domesticated Paul lives tensely with his grimly steadfast wife (Marie-Paule Laval), their teen-age son, and a newborn daughter, yet brazenly philanders with Ulrika (Johanna ter Steege), who makes no pretense of loving him. Marcus, whose girlfriend has fled to Rome, seeks desperately to win her back, while Paul encounters an angelic apparition (Aurélia Alcaïs) who, in an age-old transaction, offers her youth for his experience. Against a media backdrop of the Gulf War and its human cost, Garrel, for all of his intense personal sympathy for the artists' emotional turbulence, also presents its price. The scene where—unsurprisingly—Paul leaves home is one of the most painful scenes of paternal anguish ever filmed. In French.—*Richard Brody* (French Institute Alliance Française; Jan. 30.)

CHILDREN OF MEN

The Britain of 2027, as prophesied by Alfonso Cuarón in his new film, looks ominously close to the Britain of today—crowded, gray, and anxious. Two new crises have arisen: first, immigrants are being rounded up and caged like beasts, and, second, nobody, either in Britain or elsewhere, is able to give birth. The world is infertile, and therefore doomed; when a young woman becomes pregnant, everybody wants a piece of her. Into this crisis comes the weary Theo (Clive Owen), who is asked by an old girlfriend (Julianne Moore) to guide the expectant mother to freedom through a landscape of tribulation and trial. Cuarón gives us no time to ruminate on the credibility of his setup, quickening the pace until we are caught in a breathless running battle between dissenters and government troops. The film, based on a novel by P. D. James, is neither likable nor heartening; nor, despite the rapture of the child's birth, does it feel like the bringer of good news. Yet the fierceness of the storytelling exerts an unbroken grip, and there is leavening, of a sort, from Michael Caine, who plays a joint-puffing hippie in the woods—the last happy man in the world.—*A.L.* (1/8/07) (In wide release.)

CURSE OF THE GOLDEN FLOWER

Though Zhang Yimou's opulent visual feast is set to a slower tempo than is his movie "Hero," from 2002, it's just as luxuriously over the top. The film, set in tenth-century China, stars Chow Yun-Fat and Gong Li as the rulers of the Royal Court, whose myriad twisted intrigues and betrayals lead to a bloody fight for succession among their three heirs. The opening scenes have a bold, Busby Berkeley-like style, as crowds of people prepare in unison for a day of servitude, but, as alliances are made and secrets are revealed, the film soon slows to a more Shakespearean pace. Zhang's action scenes are impeccable, especially his wirework staging of an attack on a governor's residence. Although the story doesn't pack as powerful a punch as the visuals, the tragic pageantry is nonetheless compelling.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

DREAMGIRLS

Bill Condon's adaptation of the 1981 Broadway musical, the barely disguised tale of Berry Gordy and the rise of the Supremes, in the sixties, has an irresistible momentum. There are written expository passages and photomontages chronicling the events of the period, but just about everything else is sung. The songs aren't commentary on the drama; they *are* the drama. The three women in the original group are played by Anika Noni Rose, Beyoncé Knowles, and Jennifer Hudson, who, as the oversized Effie, doesn't fit—she has a big, soulful voice and an even bigger mouth. She's thrown out but not forgotten, and Beyoncé, whom we had barely noticed at first, moves into the center of the movie. Based on that glamorous imp Diana Ross, she allows the Berry Gordy figure (Jamie Foxx) to dress her up as a swank mannequin but finally breaks free. In its way, the picture is a serious study of the issue of commercial packaging versus art.—*David Denby* (12/25/06 & 1/1/07) (In wide release.)

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Robert De Niro's film about the rise of the C.I.A., from a brilliantly constructed screenplay by Eric Roth, is a sombre but fascinating social history of the agency and a meditation on the themes of trust and betrayal. Matt Damon, giving a recessive performance in the manner of Al Pacino's work in "Godfather II," is Edward Wilson, a Yale Skull and Bones member who gets inducted into the O.S.S. in 1939; he then spends the war in London working with a charming but treacherous Kim Philby-type British agent (Billy Crudup) and winds up in Washington as the agency's head of counterintelligence during the early Cold War period. A precise, selfless, and stolid man who operates, for all his shrewdness, in a fog of suspicion, he can't—or won't—protect those closest to him. The movie, whose wide-spanning plot (covering twenty-two years) is the working embodiment of paranoia, turns into Wilson's tragedy.—*D.D.* (12/25/06 & 1/1/07) (In wide release.)

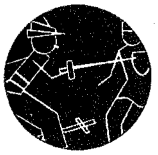
LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA

In the early scenes of Clint Eastwood's "Flags of Our Fathers," the Japanese Army, dug into caves and tunnels, lured the Americans far onto the beach by holding their fire. Now, in a unique reversal of perspective, we are inside the caves, and, cast among the Others, we find ourselves in the morally demanding but exhilarating position of rooting for them. Taken together with "Flags," this movie is a considerable act of ethical imagination, but it's not a great film. Both the defender of the island, General Kuribayashi (Ken Watanabe), and his friend and fellow-officer Baron Nishi (Tsuyoshi Ihara), an Olympic equestrian before the war, are such idealized figures—modest, gentle, and gallant—that they lose any serious interest as characters. The young Japanese soldier Saigo (Kazunari Ninomiya), a gentle baker who was conscripted into the Army and just wants to get back to his family, is meant to be a life-affirming presence among the death cultists, but, as constructed by the screenwriter, Iris Yamashita, he's a slight and bashful fellow who can't carry the philosophical weight that's been assigned to him. The movie was impressively, but also monotonously, shot by the cinematographer Tom Stern in the same style as "Flags of Our Fathers"—in a largely black-and-white palette, with occasional flashes of wine-dark blood or bits of orange flame. In Japanese.—*D.D.* (1/15/07) (In wide release.)

MISS POTTER

The tale of Beatrix Potter, as written by Richard Maltby, Jr., and directed by Chris Noonan. Renée Zellweger is cast in the leading role, although suspicions linger that she would have been more suited to playing one of Potter's own heroines: Miss Tiggywinkle, for instance. The story shows a forth-

DVD NOTES
MARTIAL ARTISTRY



It's news when an American director makes a movie about Japanese soldiers in the Second World War, but Japanese filmmakers have been making them for decades. One of the classics, "Red Angel," by Yasuzo Masumura, from 1966, newly released by the enterprising San Francisco-based distributor Fantoma, goes farther than "Letters from Iwo Jima" in depicting extraordinary acts of depravity and humanity within the ranks of the Imperial Army.

Set in 1939 in occupied China, the story concerns Sakura Nishi (Ayako Wakao), a young Army nurse at a field hospital in Tientsin, who is raped on her first night of rounds by Private Sakamoto, one of many soldiers shown to be animalized by the certain death that awaits them. (As one says, "We either kill men, screw women, or eat rations.") Sent to a field hospital near the besieged front, Sakura helps the chief surgeon, Dr. Okabe (Shinsuke Ashida), perform hundreds of amputations in three sleepless days, and falls in love with him. The cultured and cynical doctor, a freethinker who calls the war stupid and thinks that the maimed soldiers he's saved are better off dead (amputees were not allowed to return home, lest they disillusion the populace), has also become a morphine addict, which renders him impotent; Sakura takes it upon herself to cure him, helping him through the agony of withdrawal.

For Masumura, violence and sex keep close company, as with one soldier who lost both arms and begs Sakura to masturbate him, and another whose shrapnel wounds may cripple his love life. "Red Angel" features terrifying battle scenes and a cholera epidemic that spreads from a base's "comfort women," but, despite the intense and lurid subject matter, Masumura's style remains contemplative and impassive, as if he were stunned but powerless before the chaos and horror of the misguided war.

Born in 1924, Masumura (who died in 1986) was a philosophical modernist who, as seen in three more films released by Fantoma, examined the absurdities and contradictions of a modern technological society built on ancient and confining codes of behavior. The dazzlingly playful "Giants & Toys," from 1958, presents the light side of industrial espionage among three competing caramel companies and their entrenched family management. "Manji," adapted from a novel by Junichirō Tanizaki, is a lurid erotic melodrama from 1964, about two women whose mutual attraction turns obsessive and destructive; the softcore "Blind Beast," from 1969, a precursor to "In the Realm of the Senses," is a kinky, disgusting allegory about the kidnapping of a model by a blind sculptor and the ritualistic sadomasochistic degradation into which the relationship deteriorates. Though Masumura's subjects tend toward the exploitative, his analytical approach to them suggests a documentary view of the lusty underside of a formal culture.

—*Richard Brody*

right, pink-cheeked young woman entering a battle of wills with her well-to-do parents (Bill Paterson and Barbara Flynn), accepting the proposal of a mere publisher (Ewan McGregor), and ultimately relocating to the Lake District, some of which is played by the Isle of Man. The result bears traces of the charm, but almost none of the toughness, that distinguished the real Potter. The best and most prosaic scene shows her arguing with printers about the sharpness of her illustrations—which then, at unwise moments, suddenly morph into cute cartoons. With Emily Watson, who would have made an excellent Beatrix.—*A.L.* (1/22/07) (In wide release.)

NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM

A harmless, juvenile comedy about a newly employed night watchman (Ben Stiller) at New York's Museum of Natural History who tries to calm the chaos that begins when some exhibits come to life. As directed by Shawn Levy, Stiller acts more annoyed than amused, but comic work by Owen Wilson and Robin Williams keeps the film moving along. There's no story to speak of (beyond finding the source of the trouble); the movie is merely a bunch of set pieces that serve as excuses for cool special effects.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

NOTES ON A SCANDAL

A sensationally nasty and perceptive entertainment about sexual obsession and class. Judi Dench is the sixty-five-ish Barbara, a desperately lonely but formidable teacher in a dreary North London comprehensive school; Cate Blanchett is Sheba, her protégée at the school, a comfortable married bohemian who teaches art and falls in love with a cheeky fifteen-year-old working-class student (Andrew Simpson). Patrick Marber has adapted Zoë Heller's novel, which was written entirely from Barbara's point of view, and the material has now been cast in the third person; the camera observes all the characters objectively while Barbara's acerbic, self-deceiving narration wickedly frames the action. The suspense builds mercilessly as the guileless Sheba, whose placid existence is threatened by her heedless love affair, falls into the clutches of her devouring older "friend." Philip Glass's swirling music presses the issue with unnecessary insistence. With Bill Nighy as Sheba's outraged husband. Directed by Richard Eyre.—*D.D.* (1/15/07) (In wide release.)

THE PAINTED VEIL

Marriage on the rocks, W. Somerset Maugham style. Set in nineteen-twenties China, the story concerns a stuffy bacteriologist (Edward Norton) who, after discovering that his flirty wife (Naomi Watts) is having an affair, signs them up to work in a Chinese province that is suffering from a cholera epidemic. The seeming joint-suicide pact of the characters is played out in hushed, uncommunicative scenes that have the power of penance, and Norton's and Watts's performances are mutely intelligent. But when the film works in the political uprisings of the time and the redemptive power of their volunteer work (he finds the source of the disease, she takes care of orphaned children), it never heats up, and becomes gently lulling instead. The director, John Curran, and the screenwriter, Ron Nyswaner, have varnished away any trace of a rough edge.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

PAN'S LABYRINTH

The Mexican director Guillermo del Toro, who made "The Devil's Backbone," digs deeper still into his chosen field of the political horror story. The new movie is set in 1944 in a rural Spanish backwater, where Ofelia (Ivana Baquero), a young girl of unnerving poise, travels to meet her new stepfather (Sergi López), who commands a military outpost. One question posed by the film is, Who is the monster here? Is it the stepfather, with his creaking gloves and his savage treatment of local republican troublemakers? Could it be Franco, who has brought the country to this pass? Or is it the creatures—a mixture of animal, vegetable, and alien—that Ofelia meets in a stone labyrinth, and under whose eyes she endures a series of harsh, not to say sadistic, challenges? At times, her adventures are hard to watch, and the whole film works at a pitch of violence that will shock admirers of more placid fantasy. The result is provoking, inventive, and clever to a fault; everything has been planned and thought through with such care that some of the spontaneity has been squeezed from the proceedings. If it lives and breathes, it is largely due to López and to Álex Angulo, who is wonderful in the Chekhovian role of a good doctor. In Spanish.—*A.L.* (1/8/07) (In wide release.)

PERFUME: THE STORY OF A MURDERER

Patrick Süskind's best-smelling novel is finally brought to the screen, at inordinate length. Ben Whishaw plays the glowering Jean-Baptiste Grenouille, born among the fish stalls of eighteenth-century Paris, who follows his nose and becomes the assistant to a noted Italian perfumer (Dustin Hoffman). From here, our hero treks to the South of France, and, in a bid to create the perfect scent, kills a selection of young women, distilling the aroma of each. That in itself engenders a problem for the director, Tom Tykwer, who has to drag us through a roster of deaths, barely pausing to introduce the victims. The one exception is Laura (Rachel Hurd-Wood), whose father (Alan Rickman) does everything to protect her from the killer. Rickman and Hoffman recognize the tale for the rich, exotic nonsense that it is and offer ripe performances to match—unlike Whishaw, whose sniffing intensity turns the young devil into something of a humorless bore. Only toward the end does the absurdity bear fruit, as an entire French town succumbs to a mass orgy, laid bare by a whiff of the divine.—*A.L.* (In wide release.)

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS

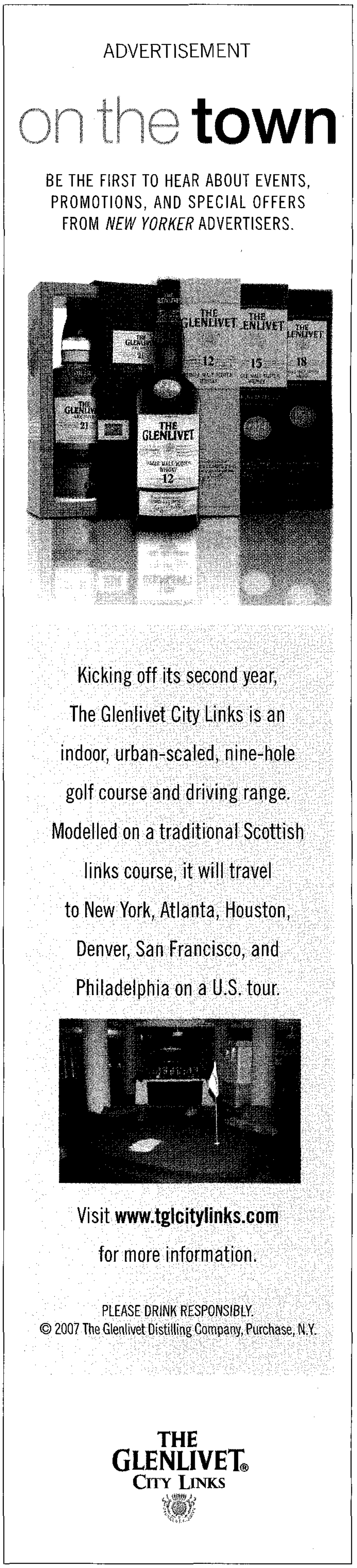
Will Smith gives an impressively grownup performance in this movie, based on the real-life experience of the businessman Chris Gardner. Failing as a San Francisco medical-supply salesman in the Reagan eighties, Gardner risks all to enter a non-paying training program at Dean Witter Reynolds, where only one of the twenty interns will be offered a position. His wife, fiercely played by Thandie Newton, leaves him and Chris, Jr. (nine-year-old Jaden Smith, Will's son). Father and son's living conditions descend steadily from apartment to motel to shelters to the streets. For a feel-good movie, it's pretty grim for much of the way, but the elder Smith's trademark flashes of humor and the soundtrack's classic Stevie Wonder songs leave little doubt that the resolution will be uplifting. Directed by Gabriele Muccino.—*Ken Marks* (In wide release.)

REGULAR LOVERS

Philippe Garrel, who, at the age of twenty, made a renowned film (now lost) in Paris during the turmoil of May, 1968, revisits those times in this intimate epic, which runs almost three hours. Centered on the love affair between François, a twentyish poet (played by Garrel's son Louis), and Lilie (Clotilde Hesme), a working-class sculptor, it brings to life four decades of Garrel's impacted thoughts in a drama that's as symbolic as it is realistic. He films the uprising with a flat theatrical abstraction, turning it into a dimly recalled dream. This is May '68 minus the politics—an outpouring of youthful desire, a yearning for sensual utopia on earth—and, as such, it's doomed. Though glimpsing paradise in fleeting moments (as when François watches a pulsing vein in the sleeping Lilie's neck), Garrel shows that the world that came after the revolt belongs to practical people with their feet on the ground. If someone other than the aesthetically radical Garrel said this, it might seem reactionary, but here it's a rueful retrospective gaze on Garrel's own sad youth and its illusions. The great William Lubtchansky's grainy black-and-white images have the feel of cold stone, and when the pragmatic Lilie challenges François to get on with his life the chill of hard reality is all the more brutal. In French.—*R.B.* (Cinema Village.)

SHOCKPROOF

Douglas Sirk's noirish melodrama, from 1949, is two films in one—both a twisty, hard-nosed battle of love and law written by Samuel Fuller and a sentimental, cliché-riddled tale of redemption scripted by Helen Deutsch at the studio's behest—and Sirk's smart direction brings the first vividly to life while leading the second through its heavy paces. In a clas-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sic triangle, Griff Marat (Cornel Wilde), a parole officer, falls in love with the paroled killer Jenny Marsh (Patricia Knight, Wilde's real-life spouse at the time), who is still in love with Harry Wesson (John Baragrey), the slick gambler for whom she took the fall. The intrigue is in the details: under the terms of her release, Jenny may not see Wesson, and may not marry. Fuller's screenplay fills all three characters with rage at their constraints, but Sirk, with exquisitely calibrated irony, emphasizes instead the deceit that all three are led to—few films have such ambiguous and unbelievable protagonists. Avoiding the conventional menacing shadows of film noir, Sirk offers something of a film blanc, with the nastiest deceptions occurring in the plain light of day—and the one character endowed with unerring insight is Marat's mother (Esther Minciotti), who is blind.—*R.B.* (Pioneer Theatre; Jan. 24-30.)

2 OR 3 THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HIM
The German filmmaker Malte Ludin's father was Hanns Ludin, a fervent Nazi since the nineteen-twenties and a close associate of Hitler who also served as ambassador to the puppet regime of Slovakia. Malte, the second-youngest of six children, was five years old when his father was executed, in 1947, for war crimes; his film courageously probes the effect of this legacy, and the revelations are shocking. His three surviving sisters find ways to minimize, excuse, and dismiss their father's crimes—one calls the murdered Jews anti-German partisans who were killed in the course of war—though Malte, a dogged researcher, presents them with wartime documents proving that their father oversaw the deportation of Slovakia's Jews despite knowing that they were headed for "physical liquidation." The filmmaker doesn't shrink from debating heatedly with his sisters onscreen or exposing them to their children as liars. His nephew Fabian declares the Third Reich guilty of "probably the most atrocious crimes ever committed in human history"; this film is a valuable attempt to confront their enduring influence. In German and Slovak.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

Also Playing

ALPHA DOG: In wide release. **THE DEAD GIRL:** In wide release. **FREEDOM WRITERS:** In wide release. **THE HITCHER:** In wide release. **MAFIOSO:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. **STOMP THE YARD:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The Images Festival, films and videos from Canada. Jan. 25 at 8: Short-film program, including "Les Héritiers" (1954, Gilles Groulx; in French). ♦ In première. Jan. 26 and Jan. 29-30 at 7 and 9 and Jan. 27-28 at 5, 7, and 9: "China Blue" (2005, Micha X. Peled). ♦ The films of Lynne Sachs. Jan. 26 at 7:30: Program 1, including "Investigation of a Flame: The Catonsville Nine" (2001). ♦ Jan. 27 at 7:30: Program 2, including "Invisible" (a work in progress). ♦ Jan. 28 at 7:30: Program 3, including "States of Unbelonging" (2006). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Jan. 27 at 5:30: "Battleship Potemkin" (1925, Sergei Eisenstein; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ Jan. 28 at 4:30: "October" (1928, Eisenstein; silent, with Russian intertitles).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Feb. 27: The films of Jean-Pierre Léaud. Jan. 30 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Birth of Love" (†).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Jan. 24-25 at 1:10, 4:10, and 7:20: "Tales of the Brothers Quay," short films (1984-2000, Stephen and Timothy Quay). ♦ Jan. 26-30 at 2, 5:20, and 8:10: "Becket" (†).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Jan. 26-28 at noon: "Ballad of a Soldier (1959, Grigori Chukhrai; in Russian). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Jan. 26-27 at midnight: "Infernal Affairs" (2002, Wai Kueng Lau and Siu Fai Mak; in English, Thai, and Cantonese).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving," films from the museum's collections. Jan. 24 and Jan. 26 at 4:30: "The White Sheik" (1952, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ Jan. 25 at 4:30: "The Emperor Jones" (1933, Dudley Murphy). ♦ In revival. Jan. 24 at 6: "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch). ♦ "Global Lens, 2007." Jan. 24 at 8:15 and Jan. 28 at 4: "On Each Side" (2006, Hugo Grosso; in Spanish and German). ♦ Jan. 25 at 6:15: "Kilometre Zero" (2005, Hiner Saleem; in French, Kurdish, and Arabic). ♦ Jan. 26 at 6:15: "Enough!" (2006, Djamila Sahraoui; in French and Arabic). ♦ Jan. 26 at 9: "A Wonderful Night in Split" (2004, Arsen Anton Ostojic; in Croatian and English). ♦ Jan. 27 at 2: "Of Love and Eggs" (2004, Garin Nugroho; in Bahasa Indonesian). ♦ Jan. 28 at 6: "Another Man's Garden" (2006, Sol de Carvalho; in Portuguese). ♦ "Feedback," video art and artist interviews. Jan. 25: Program 1, interviews with women artists, including Joan Mitchell, introduced by Kate Horsfield. ♦ Jan. 26 at 6:15: Program 2, interviews with Louise Bourgeois and Alice Neel. ♦ Jan. 26 at 7:30: Program 3, interviews with Lee Krasner and Elizabeth Murray. ♦ Jan. 27 at 6: Program 4, including an interview with Judy Chicago. ♦ "Recent Acquisitions: Universal Pictures." Jan. 29 at 6:30: "A Beautiful Mind" (2001, Ron Howard).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screenings. Jan. 27-28 at 6:30: "Nashville" (1975, Robert Altman). ♦ "Critics Choice: Great Documentaries." Jan. 28 at 3: "Bright Leaves" (2003, Ross McElwee), introduced by Lisa Schwarzbaum. ♦ Jan. 28 at 4:30: "Grizzly Man" (2005, Werner Herzog), introduced by Kyle Smith.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In revival. Jan. 24-30 at 9: "Shockproof" (†). ♦ Jan. 26 at 10:40: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper). ♦ Jan. 27 at 10:40: "Death of a President" (2006, Gabriel Range).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Jan. 24 at 7: "Intolerance" (1916, D. W. Griffith; silent), accompanied by a score by Wycliffe Gordon; introduced by Patty Marx. ♦ Jan. 26 at 9:30: "Earth" (1998, Deepa Mehta).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Jan. 26-27: "Cremaster 3" (2002, Matthew Barney).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—In revival. Jan. 27 at 11 A.M. and 2: "The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T." (1953, Roy Rowland). ♦ Jan. 28 at 1 and 6: "Army of Shadows" (1969, Jean-Pierre Melville).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—New York Jewish Film Festival. Jan. 24 at 3:30 and 8:15: "News from Home/News from House" (2005, Amos Gitai; in Arabic, Hebrew, English, and French). ♦ The films of Bahman Farmanara. Except where noted, all films are in Farsi. Jan. 26 at 2 and 6:10, Jan. 27 and Jan. 29 at 6:20, Jan. 28 at 3:45 and 8:15, and Jan. 30 at 3: "A Little Kiss" (2005). ♦ Jan. 26 at 4, Jan. 27 at 1:30, and Jan. 29 at 8:30: "Prince Ehtejab" (1974). ♦ Jan. 26 at 8:30 and Jan. 28 at 1: "Tall Shadows of the Wind" (1979). ♦ Jan. 27 at 8:30 and Jan. 30 at 1: "Smell of Camphor, Fragrance of Jasmine" (2000). ♦ Jan. 27 at 4 and Jan. 29 at 2: "The Lost Cinema" (2006, Jamsheed Akrami; in English and Farsi). ♦ Jan. 28 at 6 and Jan. 29 at 4:15: "A House Built on Water" (2002).

READINGS AND TALKS

HOUSING WORKS USED BOOK CAFÉ
Jan. 25 at 7: The poet Anne Carson reads her piece "Possessive Used as Drink (Me): A Lecture on Pronouns in the Form of Fifteen Sonnets," accompanied by videos, sound effects, and the dancers Julie Cunningham, Rashaun Mitchell, and Andrea Weber, all of whom are members of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. ♦ Jan. 30 at 7: The economist Marc Levinson, whose latest book is "The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger," talks shop with Ada Tolla and Giuseppe Lignano, of the architecture firm LOT-EK, which has converted shipping containers into houses, museums, and the like. (126 Crosby St. 212-334-3324.)

192 BOOKS
Madison Smartt Bell offers selections from his latest book, "Toussaint Louverture: A Biography." (192 Tenth Ave., between 21st and 22nd Sts. For reservations, which are required, call 212-255-4022. Jan. 26 at 7.)

NEW FEDERAL THEATRE
The thirty-five-seven-year-old theatre company inaugurates a new reading series with a book party for Amiri Baraka. Ruby Dee, Rome Neal, Lee Gundersheimer, David Shakes, and Stephen McKinley Henderson join Baraka for a reading from his latest collection of short stories, "Tales of the Out & the Gone." (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. No tickets necessary. Jan. 28 at 3.)

"GIORNO DELLA MEMORIA"
A series of events to mark the Day of Remembrance of victims of the Holocaust is scheduled for Jan. 28-Jan. 30. Highlights follow. Jan. 28 at 5: The U.S. première of "Suoni dal Silenzio," a documentary by Roberto Olla that re-creates sounds heard in the concentration camps. (Center for Jewish History, 15 W. 16th St. 212-294-8301.) Jan. 29 at 6: A tribute to Primo Levi featuring the chemist and poet Roald Hoffmann, the writer Oliver Sacks, and others. (Italian Cultural Institute, Park Ave. at 68th St. 212-879-4242.) Jan. 30 at 6:30: A reading of and discussion about "This Has Happened," by Piera Sonnino, and "Letter to My Mother," by Edith Bruck, with *The New Yorker* film critic David Denby, the translator Ann Goldstein, and the scholar Gabriella Romani. (Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò, New York University, 24 W. 12th St. 212-998-8730.)

92ND STREET Y
Martin Amis reads from his latest book, "House of Meetings," and Norman Rush reads from his forthcoming novel, "Subtle Bodies." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Jan. 29 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

OUTSIDER ART WEEK
The American Folk Art Museum celebrates the self-taught artist with a series of programs, including artist talks, panel discussions, and performances. The highlight, however, is the Outsider Art Fair at the Puck Building (at the corner of Lafayette and Houston Sts.), in which the autodidacts and their champions stand to profit from their obsessions. (45 W. 53rd St. For more information, call 212-265-1040. Jan. 23-28. The Art Fair runs Jan. 26-28; for more information about it, call 212-777-5218.)

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
Gustafer Yellowgold, a wee, friendly creature from the sun, comes to life as the illustrator and singer-songwriter Morgan Taylor (who is Gustafer's creator) performs before projected animation depicting Gustafer's adventures on earth. A discussion with Taylor follows. (35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria, Queens. 718-784-4520. Jan. 27 at 2.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
The lush, suggestive world of the Old Masters fills the auction halls this week. **Sotheby's** offers works by Goya, Watteau, and Gustave Moreau in its sale of drawings on Jan. 24, but the star of its sales of Old Master art works on Jan. 25-27 is a late, soulful work by Rembrandt, a powerful depiction of St. James the Greater in prayer, executed in shadowy browns and grays. Furniture, objects, and paintings from the gallery of the Manhattan dealer Otto Naumann will be auctioned off on Jan. 25. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** begins the week with Chinese export art on Jan. 23-24 (including a large sale devoted to the collection of Leo and Doris Hodroff), moving on to an auction of Old Master drawings on Jan. 25, highlighted by a chalk-and-ink "Adoration of the Magi" by the Venetian master Tiepolo. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Anyone curious about the inner workings of the film studios during Hollywood's golden age will enjoy **Swann's** sale of documents from the Twentieth Century Fox archives (Jan. 25), which include a memo advising Norma Jean Dougherty to change her name to Marilyn Monroe. The house will present Old Master drawings and etchings in a sale featuring more than fifty works by Rembrandt on Jan. 29. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ The fifty-third edition of the **Winter Antiques Show** holds the fort (through Jan. 28) at the 7th Regiment Armory. (Park Ave. at 67th St. 718-292-7392.)

The Roundabout revives Craig Lucas's play "Prelude to a Kiss."

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
LONDON CALLING
Feb. 2-11

Born in 1934, the British artist Donald Cammell lived a bohemian life in Paris before finding his way into film, first as a screenwriter, then as the co-director of "Performance," starring Mick Jagger, which was at once the monument and the epitaph for Swinging England. (He also acted for Kenneth Anger.) In 1996, he committed suicide. Walter Reade offers all of his features and other films in which he was involved. (212-875-5600.)

DANCE
POSSESSION
Feb. 3-10

"The Dybbuk," the Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein ballet inspired by S. Ansky's Yiddish drama, is a tale steeped in Jewish mysticism and Mitteleuropean folklore. New York City Ballet has not performed the work in its original form since 1974. (212-870-5570.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
COLD FUSION
Feb. 13-14

The vibrant and demanding Finnish conductor Osmo Vänskä, who has brought the Minnesota Orchestra back to blue-chip status, leads the group in a pair of concerts at Carnegie Hall centered on symphonies by Beethoven and Sibelius. (212-247-7800.)

THE THEATRE
LOCKING LIPS
Feb. 16

Craig Lucas's play "Prelude to a Kiss," which débuted on Broadway in 1990 and served as the basis for a 1992 film starring Meg Ryan, is about an insomniac bride and an old man who switch bodies after sharing an enchanted kiss. The Roundabout's revival will star Annie Parisse and John Mahoney. (212-719-1300.)

NIGHT LIFE
ALL'S FAIR
Feb. 23

The cabaret vocalist Andrea Marcovicci offers a belated valentine at Town Hall with her show "I'll Be Seeing You . . . Love Songs of WW II." For the first time, she'll be performing this program, featuring songs by Hoagy Carmichael, Johnny Mercer, Jule Styne, and others, backed by an orchestra. (212-307-4100.)

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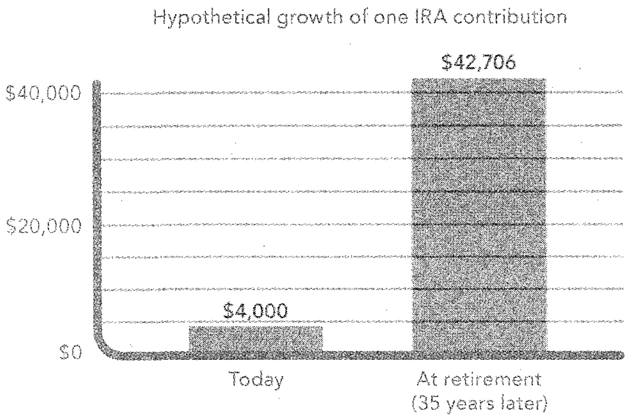

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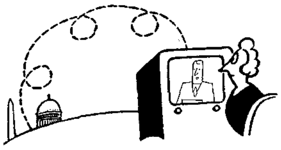
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HARD CASES



It's a good thing that you're unlikely to be approached by a small, inquisitive child who wants an explanation of the trial of Lewis (Scooter) Libby, Vice-President Cheney's former chief of staff, because what would you say? The trial has the air of a proxy prosecution of the Bush Administration, but its outcome won't have any effect on the White House. Libby's legal tormentor, Patrick Fitzgerald, a special prosecutor from Chicago, has a reputation as a tormentor of the Washington press corps. (He put one prominent reporter in jail and threatened to lock up another.) Yet, given that we think of the press and the White House as opposing forces, it's difficult to wrap our minds around the notion of them being in the dock together.

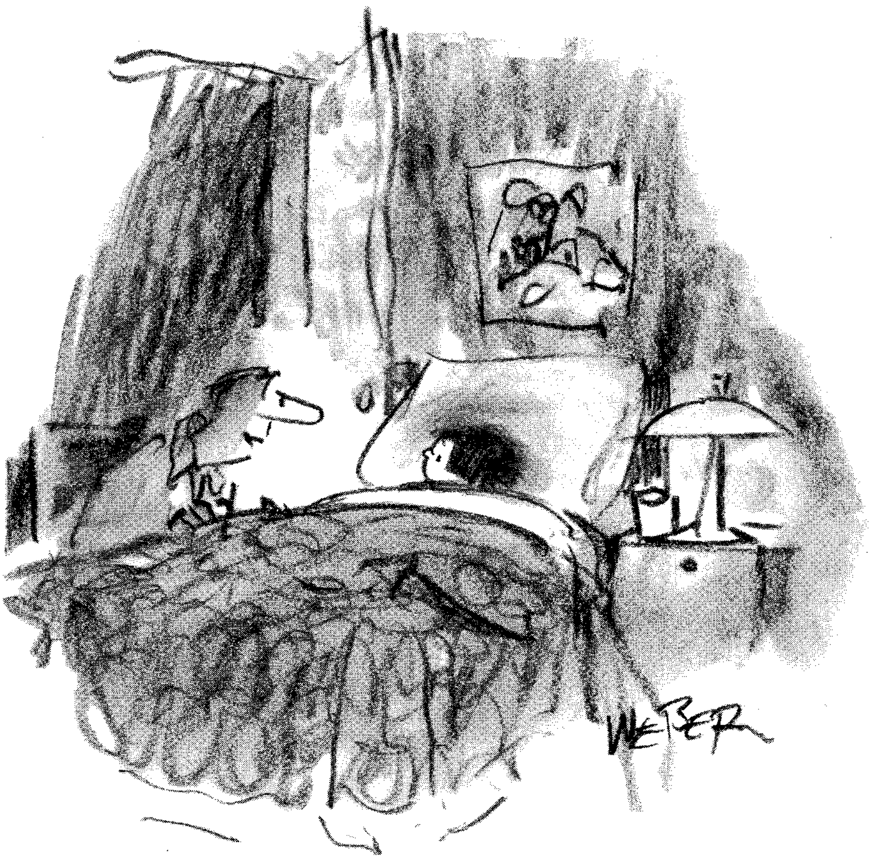
What's ultimately behind Libby's trial is the Administration's obsession with finding hard evidence for what it already believes. President Bush is often said to have misled the country into war in Iraq. But it's equally true—and more illuminating of how the White House thinks and works—that the Administration misled itself into war. Since it was convinced that Saddam Hussein was developing nuclear weapons, the absence of proof showed only that the wrong people (the C.I.A. and the United Nations) had been looking in the wrong places. So, during the run-up to the war, the search had to be conducted with a little more creativity.

In that spirit, the White House dispatched former Ambassador Joseph Wilson to Niger, in February of 2002, to find proof that the country had shipped yellowcake uranium to Iraq. Wilson not only came up empty-handed; he said so publicly, in a *Times* Op-Ed piece that he published five months later. The Administration then went on another search for evidence—the kind that could be used to discredit Wilson—and began disseminating it, off the record, to a few trusted reporters. That led to the unlawful exposure of Wilson's wife, Valerie Plame, as a C.I.A. agent. And that, in turn, brought the appointment of a special prosecutor, and another over-the-top search for evidence, this time against the Administration. Libby's trial is the result.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

The drama of incriminating evidence—the smoking gun, the damning memo, the DNA match, the latent fingerprint, the surprise confession—pervades American culture these days. It's the lifeblood of popular television shows (surely there's a "CSI: Baghdad" in the works), books, movies, and Web sites. The Bush version is particularly potent, though, both in its emotional content and in its effects. It begins with a certainty that a situation is intolerable and a frustration that most people don't see it that way. The next move is to bend the rules—to play rough, in the manner of a cop show—so that the truth comes out. All that remains is to present the shocking evidence to the world, and give the villains the punishment they deserve.

The problem with the Bush Administration is not that it is uninterested in hard facts. The problem is the way in which the Administration goes about marshalling those facts. Its working hypotheses can't be falsified, because anything that contradicts them must be dismissed. Back in the fall of 2002, the United Nations ordered Iraq to produce a report on its weapons programs. When it did, the Administration immediately rejected the report's claims: the fact that Saddam claimed not to have W.M.D.s, when we knew that he did, was itself an insupportable offense. (Hence the grim police-precinct refrain among Bush and



"Someday you, too, can become President of the United States, but first you have to establish an exploratory committee."

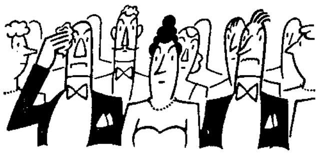
his Cabinet members: "We gave him a final chance to come clean.") Accordingly, the Administration gathered its own shards of evidence, from people less intellectually honest than Joseph Wilson, and, in the month preceding the invasion, had Colin Powell present its alternative reality to the United Nations. ("What we're giving you are facts and conclusions based on solid intelligence.") It's as if a prosecutor had donned black robes in the hope of being mistaken for a judge.

The urge to replay this drama is deeply ingrained in the Bush Administration. The torture and indefinite detention of prisoners—at Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay, and unnamed "black site" facilities—were meant to produce horrifying information that could serve P.R. purposes, not just military ones. Saddam's trial was yet another attempt to demonstrate the justice of the cause. And we are now beginning to see the same evidence-gathering passion applied to Iran's nuclear program, sponsorship of terrorism, and activities in Iraq. When, earlier this month, American troops raided an Iranian government-liaison office in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Erbil—infuriating Kurdish officials in the process—it was, in part, to find material showing that Iranian agents are behind much of the violence in Iraq. (U.S. forces took the office's files and computers, and held five employees for more than a week of questioning.)

The Administration has exhausted what was once an enormous stock of political capital by repeatedly insisting that it has uncovered the truth, and then being proved wrong. Right now, Iran, because of its size, wealth, military power, location, religious and civilian leadership, and ambitions, really is a serious threat—much more so than Iraq was four years ago. The United States' ability to do anything about that threat has been severely degraded by the Iraq war. The damage is not so much military as epistemic: if nobody believes our accounts of threats, then we can't assemble alliances to counteract them. The Libby trial reveals a White House that thought its problems were with people who could not be counted on to confirm its suspicions, like Ambassador Wilson. It should have worried less about those who would speak truth to power, and worried more that power is no longer trusted to speak truth.

—Nicholas Lemann

BOOKINGS
RINGER



Each spring, the White House Correspondents' Association hosts the President and other subsidiary potentates for an evening of obligatory conviviality and moderate drinking. Once every decade or so, someone mistakenly makes news at the correspondents' dinner by saying something ruthless and true about the President. Such was the case last year, when Stephen Colbert committed the sin of humor in the presence of President Bush. "I stand by this man," Colbert said, gesturing toward Bush, who was on the dais a few feet away. "I stand by this man because he stands for things. Not only for things, he stands on things. Things like aircraft carriers and rubble and recently flooded city squares."

This year, no such insults will be directed at the President, because the correspondents' association has hired as entertainment the impressionist Rich Little, who calls himself "basically a Republican," and whose jokes are reminiscent of Ronald Reagan's, though without the edge.

The decision to retain Little's services has raised, as they say, a host of troubling questions, including:

(1) Why not Nipsey Russell? And,

(2) Did the journalists who run the association hire Little in order to please the White House?

The answers are (1) Nipsey Russell died two years ago; and (2) no.

"Nobody from the White House complained about last year," Steve Scully, a senior executive producer of C-SPAN, and the president of the association, said by telephone. Scully added, "I walked the President out, and he said, 'Great night. I enjoyed it.' "

Scully decided to book Rich Little this year, he said, because Billy Crystal charges too much money, and because Little can impersonate many Presidents (ten, according to his Web site). "I think he's funny," Scully said. "I don't know. Some people wanted Bob Newhart. He would have been good, too."

Reached at his house in Las Vegas, Little, who is sixty-nine, and who works two or three nights a month (he next appears at the Soboba Casino, in San Jacinto, California, and then at the North Iowa Community Auditorium), seemed unaware of the controversy caused by Colbert's appearance.

"Didn't they know what they were getting?" he asked. "I think if you ask a political satirist like Dennis Miller or—the short little guy?"

Jon Stewart?

"No. Bill Maher, that's his name. If you ask a political satirist like Dennis Miller or Bill Maher or Mark Russell to come, they're going to do the political satire."

Little, who had a variety show on television in the nineteen-seventies, appeared on Letterman not long ago but hasn't had much other television work in recent years. "My agent tried to get me on Maher's show, but I was told that Bill said, 'That Rich Little is a pretty funny guy.' He didn't want to take the chance that I would be funnier." Little said that he does not find Maher and his ilk terribly funny. When asked to name a young comedian he admired, he responded, "Robin Williams. He's just off the wall."

Little said he hasn't yet settled on his material for the April correspondents' dinner. He has a vast repertoire of voices. His Web site features a hundred and sixty-three impersonations, including those of eight cartoon characters, three Muppets, and a hundred and fifteen people who are dead. These include Red Skelton, Broderick Crawford, Telly Savalas, and Maurice Chevalier.

His Web site also offers a selection of Rich Little ring tones for sale and an audio of his Dwight D. Eisenhower impersonation: "If I only knew how many men were going to be at Normandy, I would have had it catered."

Talking about the dinner, Little posed a question: "Do you think I could do a little sexual material?" He explained, "Sometimes I get a little too sexual."

Asked for an example, he offered this joke: "Bill Clinton and his pal George Bush senior were sitting around, and Clinton says"—here he switches to Clinton's voice—" 'George, have you ever tried Viagra?'

" 'I can't say,' " Little's George H. W. Bush answers. " 'I don't even know what the hell it is.'

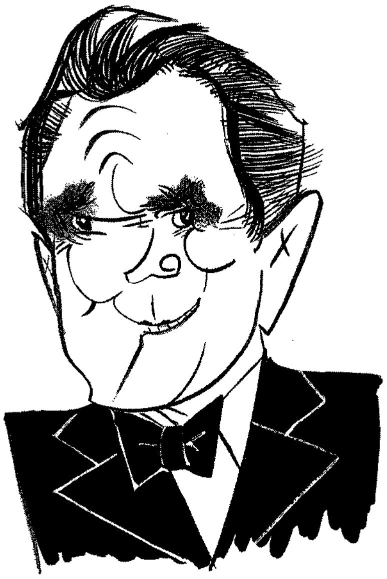
" 'Mr. President,' Clinton says, 'it gives you great staying power.'

" 'Really?' Bush says. 'Can I get it over the counter?'

"Clinton answers, 'I suppose you can, if you take two or three of them.'

"That's a funny joke," Little said.

He promised to use mostly political material, though, along these lines: "They said we're going to send jets to Israel this year, but what the hell would they do with a bunch of football players?" Iraq jokes, however, are out. "I do have a funny line on that," he said, and he began to imitate the current President: "George W. Bush here. I tell you, I'm between I-raq and a hard place."

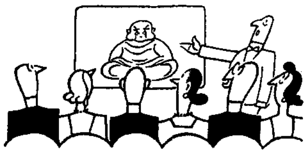


Rich Little

Little paused, and said, "That's funny. But, believe me, you won't hear the word 'Iraq' out of my mouth the whole evening. They know I'm a safe bet over there at the White House."

—*Jeffrey Goldberg*

KOOKY! DEPT.
WONDER BOYS



The first meeting of the Athanasius Kircher Society, held in the CUNY Graduate Center, on Fifth Avenue, last Tuesday evening, was billed as a contemporary wonder cabinet. Not the least of wonders is the revival of interest in Kircher, a seventeenth-century German Jesuit priest. A human search engine, Kircher published dozens of volumes on matters both large—astronomy, Egyptology, cryptography, botany, geology, geography, magnetism, and linguistics—and small, such as the real size of Noah's Ark. Travellers from all over Europe came to see his collection of marvels and oddities in Rome, at the Museum Kircherianum.

By the end of the century, however, modern methods of scholarship had proved many of Kircher's assumptions wrong, and his reputation sank to that of a gifted charlatan. According to Anthony Grafton, of Princeton University, who spoke at the meeting, a Kircher resurgence began in academic circles in the late nineteen-seventies. Kircher's popularity is also growing among the general public, at least with a certain type of self-consciously twee New York hipster (the event sold out a month in advance), for whom YouTube is a modern-day Museum Kircherianum.

Joshua Foer, a twenty-four-year-old freelance science writer, called the meeting to order. Foer is the founder of the Kircher Society, which consists mainly of a Web site that draws attention to subjects (hair museums, blind photographers, thousand-year-old pieces of popcorn) that Kircher might find inspiring. Then Grafton invoked the spirit of Kircher by reading, in Latin, a description of his descent into the crater of Mt. Vesuvius in 1638, undertaken in order to gather data on volcanism.

The first presenter was Kim Peek, the model for the Dustin Hoffman character in the 1988 movie "Rain Man." Peek has read nine thousand books, and has complete recall of them all; he can read a new book in an hour, sometimes scanning the left page with his left eye while he reads the facing page with his right. (His condition may be caused by the absence of his corpus callosum, the tissue that connects the two hemispheres of the brain.)

Peek began by asking Grafton where he lived. Princeton, the professor said. Peek informed him that the Princeton area code had been changed from 609 to 732 (almost: it changed nearby) and added, correctly, that New Jersey was ratified in 1787. The audience was then invited to try to stump the Rain Main. This turned out to be pretty easy to do. Peek didn't know the stops on London's Northern Line, but he did recall the details of the Packers-Giants championship game from 1962. There was polite applause from the audience. Kircher, in a portrait at the side of the podium, looked out at the crowd, practitioners of a kind of reverse hip—instead of being up to the minute, the point is to accumulate as much historical arcana as possible. His slight, smug smile seemed to say, "Fools! I had only books and artifacts to consult, and I knew everything. You have your Treos and your Facebook, and what do you know?"

Rosamond Purcell, another presenter, showed slides of her photographs, an eerie grotesquerie of natural-historical specimens. (She made several of these "catalogues" in collaboration with Stephen Jay Gould.) Her work conveys a sense of darkness within the scientific method; she seemed drawn to Kircher not for his contributions to science but for his curatorial interest in freaks and pathologies.

Then it was time for the world première of the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet" performed in Solresol, a seven-syllable universal language invented in the early nineteenth century, in which each syllable corresponds to the seven notes of the major scale.

"Fa do-re re-sol-do mi-do-do-sol?" Romeo beseeched. For sheer geekiness, this was the evening's high point.

Finally, the society heard from retired Colonel Joe Kittinger, who made the world's highest parachute jump, in 1960, from 102,800 feet. He told a harrowing story of a seventy-six-thousand-foot jump, in which his parachute wrapped around his neck, sending him into a 140-r.p.m. spin—until, at last, the reserve chute deployed. It wasn't clear what Kittinger had to do with Kircher.

At the end of the meeting, a replica of a two-foot-long walrus-penis bone, or baculum, was presented to whoever had the program printed with the words "Walrus Baculum."

"Mine!" said a man in the audience, leaping up with his program.

"All right!" Foer shouted, shaking the penis bone above his head, while the Kircherians roared.

—*John Seabrook*

DARNEDEST THINGS DEPT.
BAND OF BROTHERS

Nat and Alex Wolff, the brothers in the Naked Brothers Band, have been working together for five years, since the evening they got out of the bathtub and began singing and jumping around. Eventually, they got dressed, picked up instruments, and, along with a few friends, started playing neighborhood gigs. Nat, who is twelve and is known as "the girl magnet," is the singer, songwriter, and piano man; Alex, nine, plays drums. Their big single, which Nat wrote when he was six, is called "Crazy Car." As a nine-year-old female fan remarked the other day, "I like it because it's about a love that leads you nowhere."

Nat and Alex live with their parents, the jazz pianist Michael Wolff and the actress Polly Draper, on lower Fifth Avenue. Two and a half years ago, Draper decided that it would be funny to make a film about them. The result, a winsome, relatively ungoofy, half-made-up chronicle of the boys' exploits—"Spinal Tap" meets Our Gang—was picked up by Nickelodeon, which then signed the boys on for a TV series. The movie airs Saturday; the show begins next week. It parodies fame, and probably dooms them to it. Here's a prediction: Nat makes the cover of *Tiger Beat*, if not *Rolling Stone*, by year's end.

The tricky thing with the Naked Brothers is figuring out what's real and what's not. On the show and in the movie, for example, their father, as played by their father, is a dorky accordionist who is desperate to join the band. In real life, he's got his own thing going on. And on TV the boys are motherless; Draper, who writes and directs most of the episodes, thought the show would be better off without a mother imposing order on the kids' rock-star idyll. Nat and Alex, though, seem to be pretty much what you see on TV: Nat, a lanky treble with a sunny stage manner and a Paul McCartney mullet, is the pop-hook prodigy, and Alex, with long curly hair and fake tattoos, is the imp—Ringo, by way of Alex Van Halen.

"A lot of the time when I get recognized, and I have been recognized like five times, people think I'm my character," Nat said one night last week.

"Well, you *are* your character," Draper said.

"I know, but they don't make the distinction."

"They never do," Wolff said.

The four were sitting around their dining-room table, eating lasagna, salad, and green beans. Alex slouched in his seat, bare feet on the table; Nat was animated, playing air bass and humming falsetto melodies.

Alex: "The difference is that Nat's cool in the show. Ha-ha-ha-ha."

Draper: "He's not *that* cool in the show."

Nat: "Thanks, Mom."

Wolff quietly urged Alex to remove his feet from the table.

Talk turned to the Beatles, Nat's favorite band. "O.K., guys, I can do all four Beatles," Nat said, adopting an accent that sounded more Tufnel than Scouser. "This is John: 'This just the way it, you know, goes.' He talks like this. And then Paul talks like this: 'You know, um, we're just, you know, a little band.' " The parents beamed.

Alex piped up, "I'm Ringo. 'Ringo. Ringo.' I can do it, Mommy. 'Ring-go, Ring-go.' "

"But Ringo wouldn't say his own name," Nat said.

Alex writes songs, too. He'd recently recorded one called "Three Is Enough." ("One is O.K., two is fine, three is enough.")

"It's about girls," his mother said.

"No, it's about math," Nat said.

"It's about doughnuts," Alex said.

"It's about girls," his mother repeated.

"Shut up, it's about doughnuts!"

Everyone laughed, and Alex, holding up a glass of milk, declared woozily, "Let's drink to that."

Alex sneaked off to watch some unsanctioned TV (a family friend once remarked of him, "Do you ever get the feeling that Alex is just an independent contractor working out of your home?") while Nat donned boxing gloves and jabbed at a heavy bag that hung near the table. Then he began dunking a basketball into a six-foot hoop, nearby.

After a while, the parents coaxed the boys into putting on a little show. A drum kit and a grand piano occupied a corner of the living room. Nat sang a number called "I'll Do Anything for You" as Alex bashed away, neighbors be damned. Wolff said, "He plays the drums like a *man*."

BASKETBALL
35

The Naked Brothers

More songs followed (Nat has written more than a hundred and fifty). "Everyone's cried at least once." Then: "Your love keeps me on the ground." And finally: "You need a taxicab!"

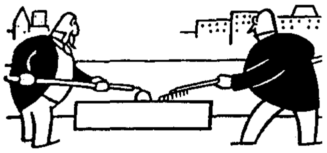
"Guys, it's time to brush your teeth," Wolff said. Alex obeyed. Nat resisted. "I like to stay up," he said. "That's when I write all my best stuff." He picked up an acoustic guitar and started playing the intro to "Day Tripper."

"Nat, brush your teeth."

Nat ignored his father and played a few bars of "Smoke on the Water."

—*Nick Paumgarten*

COMEBACK SAND MEN



A couple of weeks ago, the Parks Department announced that the architect David Rockwell had designed an innovative playground to be constructed near the South Street Seaport. In the days that followed, the *Times* published five articles on the subject; one front-page headline read, "NEW YORK TRIES TO THINK OUTSIDE THE SANDBOX." Yet one of the more radical features of the new playground is that there actually *is* a sandbox—in fact, an entire "zone of sand." Sandboxes have disappeared from city-run playgrounds slowly, and many people are unaware that there are only fifty-two left. (In the nineteen-seventies, there were as many as eight hundred.) If the Rockwell model catches on, it may herald the return of sand to New York City playgrounds. And this is likely to mean the return of the question that led to the disappearance in the first place: Are those things clean?

An informal survey of parents and nannies at sandboxes across the city finds that people fall into two categories: those who have never thought about how often the sand is cleaned, and those who think about it frequently and don't want to know. "People talk about how rats come at night and use it as a litter box," a woman at Mariner's Playground, in Central Park, said. "I wash my son's hands when he comes out." Another woman recounted a story about friends who found a syringe in a sandbox: "They just packed up and moved out of the city. To Darien, I think."

Bob Redmond, the director of capital projects for the Manhattan division of the Parks Department, is quick to dispel these fears. Not only are the city's sandboxes sifted clean regularly, he said, but every year—or at least every other year—every sand pit in the city is shovelled out and replenished. According to Redmond, the most vulnerable sandboxes are those which are hidden from the street. "If sandboxes are not in protected areas, people run their dogs through them," he said. "You don't want kids to take dog waste and put it in their mouths. They put everything in their mouths." So when the city began refurbishing playgrounds, in the nineteen-eighties, sandboxes were generally phased out.

There were arguments against this measure, Redmond explained. "Psychologists tell us that sand is an important play element because children get to learn that they can 'shape their world.' I don't know what that means, but that's what they tell us." He went on, "Years ago, when we didn't have any money, we'd just go and take new sand from the beach." Today, the city buys bleached, lead-free, playground-grade sand.

Yet there will always be parents who don't trust what's in there. A few years ago, a writer and filmmaker named Peter von Ziegesar wrote an essay for a downtown newspaper which he said was "loosely based on events" surrounding an allegedly filthy sandbox at the Bleecker Street Playground. "It turned out the city, as a matter of policy, did not replace sand in playgrounds," von Ziegesar wrote. "Sand had been around since the time of the dinosaurs, the thinking went, and would be here long after the West Village had melted into the Hudson River. Rain from the sky would wash the sand in fresh water, sunlight sterilize it, air from New Jersey fluff it dry and ants carry off any crumbs and excess organic matter."

When Redmond was told of von Ziegesar's story, he said, "Who the hell is he? He's not a sandbox expert." Redmond did a quick records search and confirmed that the sandbox at Bleecker Street was last changed in 2005 and is due to be changed again this spring.

At this point, an inspection of the Bleecker Street sandbox seemed warranted. A visit noted the following debris: two Band-Aids (one a Spider-Man), a plastic cup from Elixir Juice, a sheet of aluminum foil, a crushed water bottle (later stricken from the list after being reclassified as a toy by a small child), many leaves and twigs, and an object that could not be identified but which prompted a cry of "Nicky, no! Don't put that in your mouth!" from a nearby bench. Over all, the area seemed passably clean, and even getting cleaner, as a pigeon removed from the sand something that may have been a Cheeto.

—*Daniel Radosh*

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MEDICAL DISPATCHES

WHAT'S THE TROUBLE?

How doctors think.

BY JEROME GROOPMAN

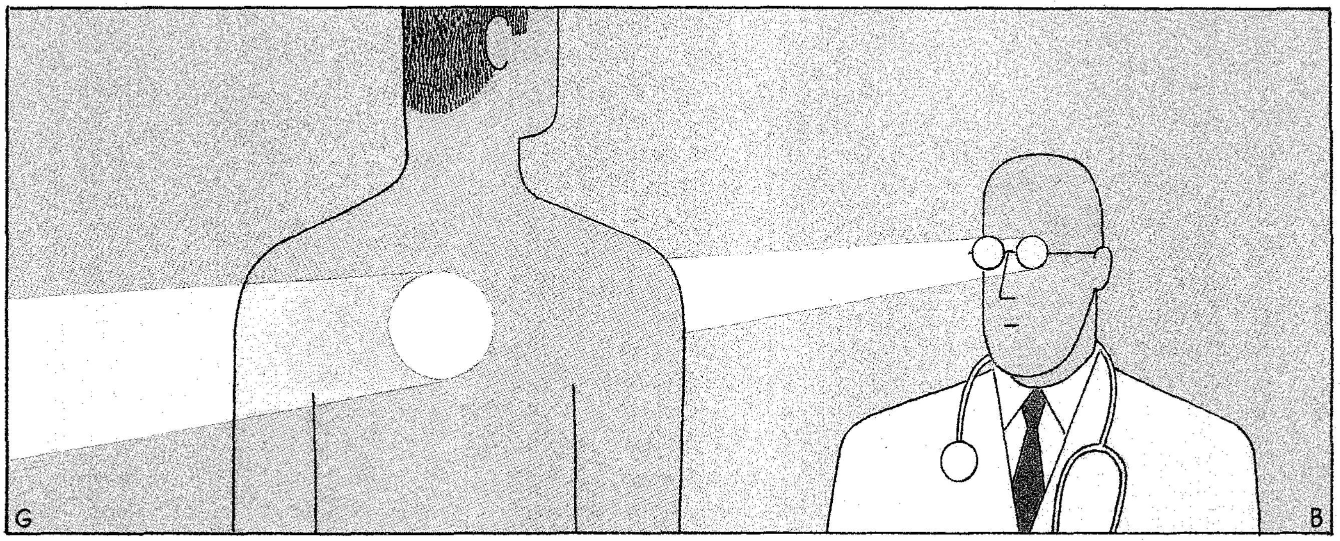
On a spring afternoon several years ago, Evan McKinley was hiking in the woods near Halifax, Nova Scotia, when he felt a sharp pain in his chest. McKinley (a pseudonym) was a forest ranger in his early forties, trim and extremely fit. He had felt discomfort in his chest for several days, but this was more severe: it hurt each time he took a breath. McKinley slowly made his way through the woods to a shed that housed his office, where he sat and waited for the pain to pass. He frequently carried heavy packs on his back and was used to muscle aches, but this pain felt different. He decided to see a doctor.

Pat Croskerry was the physician in charge in the emergency room at Dartmouth General Hospital, near Halifax, that day. He listened intently as McKinley described his symptoms. He noted that McKinley was a muscular man; that his face was ruddy, as would be expected of someone who spent most of his day outdoors; and that he was not sweating. (Perspiration can be a sign of cardiac distress.) McKinley told him that the pain was in the center of his chest, and that it had not spread into his arms, neck, or back. He told Croskerry that he had never smoked or been overweight; had no family history of heart attack, stroke, or diabetes; and was under no particular stress. His family life was fine, McKinley said, and he loved his job.

Croskerry checked McKinley's blood pressure, which was normal, and his pulse, which was sixty and regular—typical for an athletic man. Croskerry listened to McKinley's lungs and heart, but detected no abnormalities. When he pressed on the spot between McKinley's ribs and breastbone, McKinley felt no pain. There was no swelling or tenderness in his calves or thighs. Finally, the doctor ordered an electrocardiogram, a chest X-ray, and blood tests to measure McKinley's cardiac enzymes. (Abnormal levels of cardiac enzymes indicate damage to the heart.) As Croskerry expected, the results of all the tests were normal. "I'm not at all worried about your chest pain," Croskerry told McKinley, before sending him home. "You probably overexerted yourself in the field and strained a muscle. My suspicion that this is coming from your heart is about zero."

Early the next evening, when Croskerry arrived at the emergency room to begin his shift, a colleague greeted him. "Very interesting case, that man you saw yesterday," the doctor said. "He came in this morning with an acute myocardial infarction." Croskerry was shocked. The colleague tried to console him. "If I had seen this guy, I wouldn't have gone as far as you did in ordering all those tests," he said. But Croskerry knew that he had made an error that could have cost the ranger his life. (McKinley survived.) "Clearly, I missed it," Croskerry told me, referring to McKinley's heart attack. "And why did I miss it? I didn't miss it because of any egregious behavior, or negligence. I missed it because my thinking was overly influenced by how healthy this man looked, and the absence of risk factors."

Croskerry, who is sixty-four years old, began his career as an experimental psychologist, studying rats' brains in the laboratory. In 1979, he decided to become a doctor, and, as a medical student, he was surprised at how little attention was paid to what he calls the "cognitive dimension" of clinical decision-making—the process by which doctors interpret their patients' symptoms and weigh test results in order to arrive at a diagnosis and a plan of treatment. Students spent the first two years of medical school memorizing facts about physiology, pharmacology, and pathology; they spent the last two learning practical applications for this knowledge, such as how to decipher an EKG and how to determine the appropriate dose of insulin for a diabetic. Croskerry’s instructors rarely bothered to describe the mental logic they relied on to make a correct diagnosis and avoid mistakes.



Most physicians already have in mind two or three possible diagnoses within minutes of meeting a patient.

In 1990, Croskerry became the head of the emergency department at Dartmouth General Hospital, and was struck by the number of errors made by doctors under his supervision. He kept lists of the errors, trying to group them into categories, and, in the mid-nineties, he began to publish articles in medical journals, borrowing insights from cognitive psychology to explain how doctors make clinical decisions—especially flawed ones—under the stressful conditions of the emergency room. “Emergency physicians are required to make an unusually high number of decisions in the course of their work,” he wrote in “Achieving Quality in Clinical Decision Making: Cognitive Strategies and Detection of Bias,” an article published in *Academic Emergency Medicine*, in 2002. These doctors’ decisions necessarily entail a great deal of uncertainty, Croskerry wrote, since, “for the most part, patients are not known and their illnesses are seen through only small windows of focus and time.” By calling physicians’ attention to common mistakes in medical judgment, he has helped to promote an emerging field in medicine: the study of how doctors think.

GUY BILLOUT

There are limited data about the frequency of misdiagnoses. Research from the nineteen-eighties and nineties suggests that they occur in about fifteen per cent of cases, but Croskerry suspects that the rate is significantly higher. He believes that many misdiagnoses are the result of readily identifiable—and often preventable—errors in thinking.

Doctors typically begin to diagnose patients the moment they meet them. Even before they conduct an examination, they are interpreting a patient’s appearance: his complexion, the tilt of his head, the movements of his eyes and mouth, the way he sits or stands up, the sound of his breathing. Doctors’ theories about what is wrong continue to evolve as they listen to the patient’s heart, or press on his liver. But research shows that most physicians already have in mind two or three possible diagnoses within minutes of meeting a patient, and that they tend to develop their hunches from very incomplete information. To make diagnoses, most doctors rely on shortcuts and rules of thumb—known in psychology as “heuristics.”

Heuristics are indispensable in medicine; physicians must often make quick judgments about how to treat a patient, on the basis of a few, potentially serious symptoms. A doctor is trained to assume, for example, that a patient suffering from a high fever and sharp pain in the lower right side of the abdomen could be suffering from appendicitis; he immediately sends the patient for X-rays and contacts the surgeon on call. But, just as heuristics can help doctors save lives, they can also lead them to make grave errors. In retrospect, Croskerry realized that when he saw McKinley in the emergency room the ranger had been experiencing unstable angina—a surge of chest pain that is caused by coronary-artery disease and that may precede a heart attack. “The unstable angina didn’t show on the EKG, because fifty per cent of such cases don’t,” Croskerry said. “His unstable angina didn’t show up on the cardiac-enzymes test, because there had been no damage to his heart muscle yet. And it didn’t show up on the chest X-ray, because the heart had not yet begun to fail, so there was no fluid backed up in the lungs.”

The mistake that Croskerry made is called a “representativeness” error. Doctors make such errors when their thinking is overly influenced by what is typically true; they fail to consider possibilities that contradict their mental templates of a disease, and thus attribute symptoms to the wrong cause. Croskerry told me that he had immediately noticed the ranger’s trim frame: most fit men in their forties are unlikely to be suffering from heart disease. Moreover, McKinley’s pain was not typical of coronary-artery disease, and the results of the physical examination and the blood tests did not suggest a heart problem. But, Croskerry emphasized, this was precisely the point: “You have to be prepared in your mind for the atypical and not be too quick to reassure yourself, and your patient, that everything is O.K.” (Croskerry could have kept McKinley under observation and done a second cardiac-enzyme test or had him take a cardiac stress test, which might have revealed the source of his chest pain.) When Croskerry teaches students and interns about representativeness errors, he cites Evan McKinley as an example.

THE GIFT OF MEDIATION

Shadow warns shadow that you approach,
light warns light.
Frightened, a wild dove starts up. You are an obstacle,
not foreseen here between the pines' loftiness
and the penal divisions of low grasses.
You are a foundling looking for a family,
a prodigal son who has fled
and returns to bear witness to the independence
of trees, thistles, the quick butterflies and dying dragonflies.
It is through them this moment of peace comes to us,
they help grace descend on the wing
of an unknown bird,
and it is their voices—the ermine's cry, moan of a dove,
complaint of an owl—that remind us
the hardship of solitude is measured out equally.

—Julia Hartwig

(*Translated, from the Polish, by John and Bogdana Carpenter.*)

Doctors can also make mistakes when their judgments about a patient are unconsciously influenced by the symptoms and illnesses of patients they have just seen. Many common infections tend to occur in epidemics, afflicting large numbers of people in a single community at the same time; after a doctor sees six patients with, say, the flu, it is common to assume that the seventh patient who complains of similar symptoms is suffering from the same disease. Harrison Alter, an emergency-room physician, recently confronted this problem. At the time, Alter was working in the emergency room of a hospital in Tuba City, Arizona, which is situated on a Navajo reservation. In a three-week period, dozens of people had come to his hospital suffering from viral pneumonia. One day, Blanche Begaye (a pseudonym), a Navajo woman in her sixties, arrived at the emergency room complaining that she was having trouble breathing. Begaye was a compact woman with long gray hair that she wore in a bun. She told Alter that she had begun to feel unwell a few days earlier. At first, she said, she had thought that she had a bad head cold, so she had drunk orange juice and tea, and taken a few aspirin. But her symptoms had got worse. Alter noted that she had a fever of 100.2 degrees, and that she was breathing rapidly—at almost twice the normal rate. He listened to her lungs but heard none of the harsh sounds, called rhonchi, that suggest an accumulation of mucus. A chest X-ray showed that Begaye's lungs did not have the white streaks typical of viral pneumonia, and her white-blood-cell count was not elevated, as would be expected if she had the illness.

However, a blood test to measure her electrolytes revealed that her blood had become slightly acidic, which can occur in the case of a major infection. Alter told Begaye that he thought she had "subclinical pneumonia." She was in the early stages of the infection, he said; the virus had not yet affected her lungs in a way that would show up on a chest X-ray. He ordered her to be admitted to the hospital and given intravenous fluids and medicine to bring her fever down. Viral pneumonia can tax an older person's heart and sometimes cause it to fail, he told her, so it was prudent that she remain under observation by doctors. Alter referred Begaye to the care of an internist on duty and began to examine another patient.

A few minutes later, the internist approached Alter and took him aside. "That's not a case of viral pneumonia," the doctor said. "She has aspirin toxicity."

Immediately, Alter knew that the internist was right. Aspirin toxicity occurs when patients overdose on the drug, causing hyperventilation and the accumulation of lactic acid and other acids in the blood. "Aspirin poisoning—bread-and-butter toxicology," Alter told me. "This was something that was drilled into me throughout my training. She was an absolutely classic case—the rapid breathing, the shift in her blood electrolytes—and I missed it. I got cavalier."

Alter's misdiagnosis resulted from the use of a heuristic called "availability," which refers to the tendency to judge the likelihood of an event by the ease with which relevant examples come to mind. This tendency was first described in 1973, in a paper by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, psychologists at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For example, a businessman may estimate the likelihood that a given venture could fail by recalling difficulties that his associates had encountered in the marketplace, rather than by relying on all the data available to him about the venture; the experiences most familiar to him can bias his assessment of the chances for success. (Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002, for his research on decision-making under conditions of uncertainty.) The diagnosis of subclinical pneumonia was readily available to Alter, because he had recently seen so many cases of the infection. Rather than try to integrate all the information he had about Begaye's illness, he had focussed on the symptoms that she shared with other patients he had seen: her fever, her rapid breathing, and the acidity of her blood. He dismissed the data that contradicted his diagnosis—the absence of rhonchi and of white streaks on the chest X-ray, and the normal white-blood-cell count—as evidence that the infection was at an early stage. In fact, this information should have made him doubt his hypothesis. (Psychologists call this kind of cognitive cherry-picking "confirmation bias": confirming what you expect to find by selectively accepting or ignoring information.)

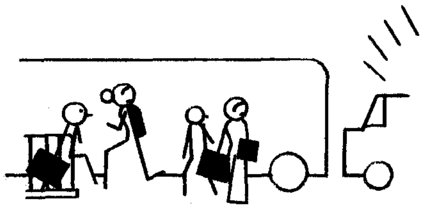
After the internist made the correct diagnosis, Alter recalled his conversation with Begaye. When he had asked whether she had taken any medication, including over-the-counter drugs, she had replied, "A few aspirin." As Alter told me, "I didn't define with her what 'a few' meant." It turned out to be several dozen.

Representativeness and availability errors are intellectual mistakes, but the errors that doctors make because of their feelings for a patient can be just as significant. We all want to believe that our physician likes us and is moved by our plight. Doctors, in turn, are encouraged to develop positive feelings for their patients; caring is generally held to be the cornerstone of humanistic medicine. Sometimes, however, a doctor's impulse to protect a patient he likes or admires can adversely affect his judgment.

In 1979, I treated Brad Miller (a pseudonym), a young literature instructor who was suffering from bone cancer. I was living in Los Angeles at the time, completing a fellowship in hematology and oncology at the U.C.L.A. Medical Center. "You look familiar," Brad said to me when I introduced myself to him in his hospital room as the doctor who would be overseeing his care. "I see you running with two or three friends around the university," he said. "I'm a runner, too—or, at least, was."

I told Brad that I hoped he would be able to run again soon, though I warned him that his chemotherapy treatment would be difficult.

About six weeks earlier, Brad had noticed an ache in his left knee. He had been training to run in a marathon, and at first he thought that the ache was caused by a sore muscle. He saw a specialist in sports medicine, who examined the leg and recommended that he wear a knee brace when he ran. Brad followed this advice, but the ache got worse. The physician ordered an X-ray, which showed an osteosarcoma, a cancerous growth, around the end of the femur, just above the knee.



Several years earlier, the surgical-oncology department at U.C.L.A. had devised an experimental treatment for this kind of sarcoma, involving a new chemotherapy drug called Adriamycin. Oncologists had nicknamed Adriamycin "the red death," because of its cranberry color and its toxicity. Not only did it cause severe nausea, vomiting, mouth blisters, and reduced blood counts; repeated doses could injure cardiac muscle and lead to heart failure. Patients had to be monitored closely, since once the heart is damaged there is no good way to restore its pumping capacity. Still, doctors at U.C.L.A. had found that giving patients multiple doses of Adriamycin often shrank tumors, allowing them to surgically remove the cancer without amputating the affected limb—the standard approach in the past.

I began administering the treatment that afternoon. Despite taking Compazine to stave off vomiting, Brad was acutely nauseated. After several doses of chemotherapy, his white-blood-cell count dropped precipitately. Because his immune system was weakened, he was at great risk of contracting an infection. I required visitors to Brad's room to wear a mask, a gown, and gloves, and instructed the nurses not to give him raw food, in order to limit his exposure to bacteria.

"Not to your taste," I said at the end of the first week of treatment, seeing an untouched meal on his tray.

"My mouth hurts," Brad whispered. "And, even if I could chew, it looks pretty tasteless."

I agreed that the food looked dismal. "What is to your taste?" I asked. "Fried kidney?"

I had told Brad when we met that I had studied "Ulysses" in college, in a freshman seminar. The professor had explained the relevant Irish history, the subtle references to Catholic liturgy, and a number of other allusions that most of us in the class would otherwise not have grasped. I had enjoyed Joyce's descriptions of Leopold Bloom eating fried kidneys.

Brad was my favorite patient on the ward. Each morning when I made rounds with the residents and the med-

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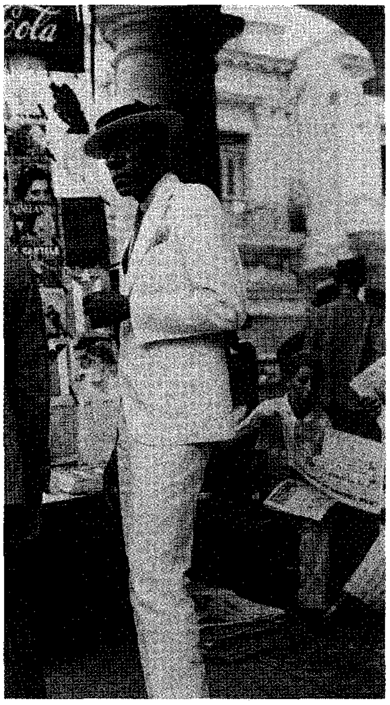

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Walker Evans (American, 1903-1975). "Citizen in Downtown Havana, Cuba," 1933. The Art Institute of Chicago, gift of Mrs. James Ward Thorne.

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AIR FRANCE SKYTEAM

ical students, I would take an inventory of his symptoms and review his laboratory results. I would often linger a few moments in his room, trying to distract him from the misery of his therapy by talking about literature.

The treatment called for a CAT scan after the third cycle of Adriamycin. If the cancer had shrunk sufficiently, the surgery would proceed. If it hadn't, or if the cancer had grown despite the chemotherapy, then there was little to be done short of amputation. Even after amputation, patients with osteosarcomas are at risk of a recurrence.

One morning, Brad developed a low-grade fever. During rounds, the residents told me that they had taken blood and urine cultures and that Brad's physical examination was "nonfocal"—they had found no obvious reason for the fever. Patients often get low fevers during chemotherapy after their white-blood-cell count falls; if the fever has no identifiable cause, the doctor must decide whether and when to administer a course of antibiotics.

"So you feel even more wiped out?" I asked Brad.

He nodded. I asked him about various symptoms that could help me determine what was causing the fever. Did he have a headache? Difficulty seeing? Pressure in his sinuses? A sore throat? Problems breathing? Pain in his abdomen? Diarrhea? Burning on urination? He shook his head.

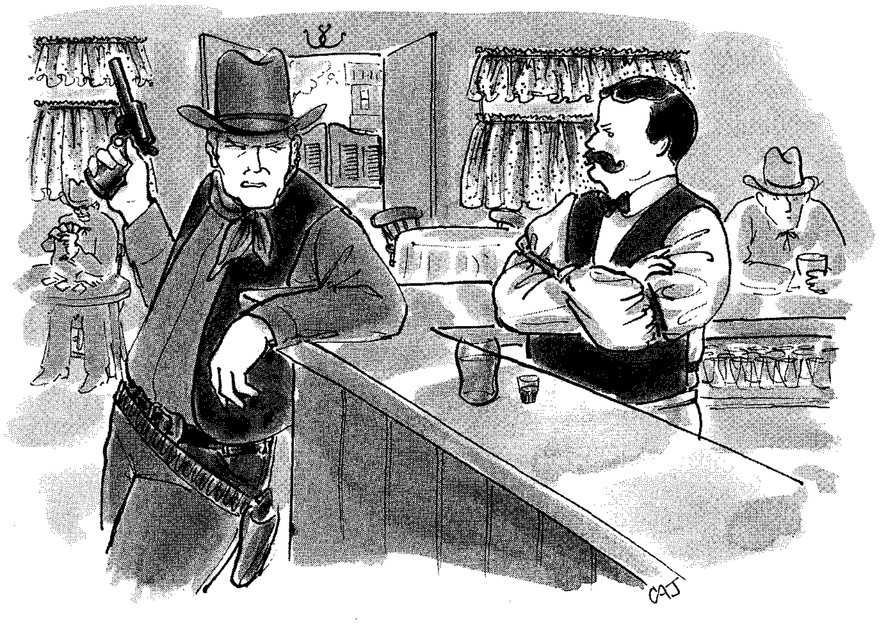
Two residents helped prop Brad up in bed so that I could examine him; I had a routine that I followed with each immune-deficient patient, beginning at the crown of the head and working down to the tips of the toes. Brad's hair was matted with sweat, and his face was ashen. I peered into his eyes, ears, nose, and throat, and found only some small ulcers on his inner cheeks and under his tongue—side effects of his treatment. His lungs were clear, and his heart sounds were strong. His abdomen was soft, and there was no tenderness over his bladder.

"Enough for today," I said. Brad looked exhausted; it seemed wise to let him rest.

Later that day, I was in the hematology lab, looking at blood cells from a patient with leukemia, when my beeper went off. "Brad Miller has no blood pressure," the resident told me when I returned the call. "His temperature is up to a hundred and four, and we're moving him to the I.C.U."

Brad was in septic shock. When bacteria spread through the bloodstream, they can damage the circulation. Septic shock can be fatal even in people who are otherwise healthy; patients with impaired immunity, like Brad, whose white-blood-cell count had fallen because of chemotherapy, are at particular risk of dying.

"Do we have a source of infection?" I asked.



"You have till sundown to get rid of those awful curtains."

"He has what looks like an abscess on his left buttock," the resident said.

Patients who lack enough white blood cells to fight bacteria are prone to infections at sites that are routinely soiled, like the area between the buttocks. The abscess must have been there when I examined Brad. But I had failed to ask him to roll over so that I could inspect his buttocks and rectal area.

The resident told me that he had repeated Brad's cultures and started him on broad-spectrum antibiotics, and that the I.C.U. team was about to take over.

I was furious with myself. Because I liked Brad, I hadn't wanted to add to his discomfort and had cut the examination short. Perhaps I hoped unconsciously that the cause of his fever was trivial and that I would not find evidence of an infection on his body. This tendency to make decisions based on what we wish were true is what Croskerry calls an "affective error." In medicine, this type of error can have potentially fatal consequences. In the case of Evan McKinley, for example, Pat Croskerry chose to rely on the ranger's initial test results—the normal EKG, chest X-ray, and blood tests—rather than arrange for follow-up testing. Croskerry, who had been an Olympic rower in his thirties, told me that McKinley had reminded him of himself as an athlete; he believed that this association contributed to his misdiagnosis.

As soon as I finished my work in the lab, I rushed to the I.C.U. to check on Brad. He was on a respirator and opened his eyes wide to signal hello. Through an intravenous line attached to one arm, he was receiving pressors, drugs that cause the heart to pump more effectively and increase the tone of the vessels to help maintain blood pressure. Brad's heart was holding up, despite all the Adriamycin he had taken. His platelet count had fallen, as often happens with septic shock, and he was receiving platelet transfusions. The senior doctor in the I.C.U. had told Brad's parents, who lived nearby, that he was extremely ill. I saw his parents sitting in a room next to the I.C.U., their heads bowed. They had not seen me, and I was tempted to avoid them. But I forced myself to speak to them and offered a few words of encouragement. They thanked me for my care of their son, which only made me feel worse.

The next morning, I arrived before the residents to review my patients' charts. Rounds lasted an hour longer than usual, as I insisted on double-checking each bit of information that the residents offered about the patients in our care.

Brad Miller survived. Slowly, his white-blood-cell count increased, and the infection was resolved. After he left the I.C.U., I told him that I should have examined him more thoroughly that morning, but I did not explain why I had not. A CAT scan showed that his sarcoma had shrunk enough for him to undergo surgery without amputation, but a large portion of his thigh muscle had to be removed along with the tumor. After he recovered, he was no longer able to run, but occasionally I saw him riding his bicycle on campus.

Medical education has not changed substantially since Pat Croskerry and I were trained. Students are still expected to assimilate large amounts of basic science and apply that knowledge as they are taught practical aspects of patient care. And young physicians still learn largely by observing more senior members of their field. ("See one, do one, teach one" remains a guiding maxim at medical schools.) This approach produces confident and able physicians. Yet the ideal it implies, of the doctor as a dispassionate and rational actor, is misguided. As Tversky and Kahneman and other cognitive psychologists have shown, when people are confronted with uncertainty—the situation of every doctor attempting to diagnose a patient—they are susceptible to unconscious emotions and personal biases, and are more likely to make cognitive errors. Croskerry believes that the first step toward incorporating an awareness of heuristics and their liabilities into medical practice is to recognize that how doctors think can affect their success as much as how much they know, or how much experience they have. "Currently, in medical training, we fail to recognize the importance of critical thinking and critical reasoning," Croskerry told me. "The implicit assumption in medicine is that we know how to think. But we don't." ♦

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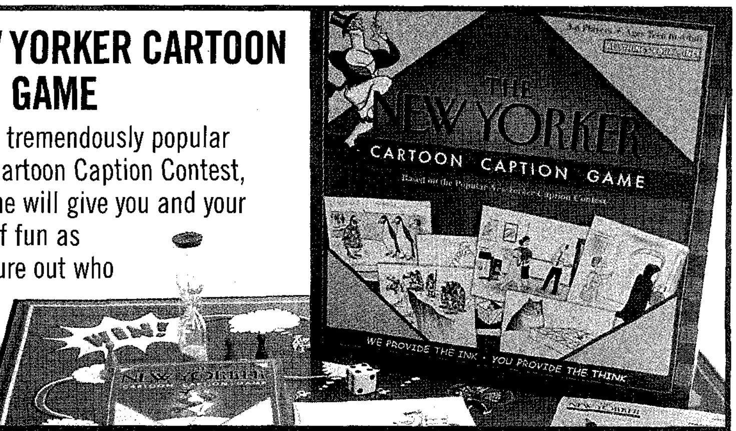

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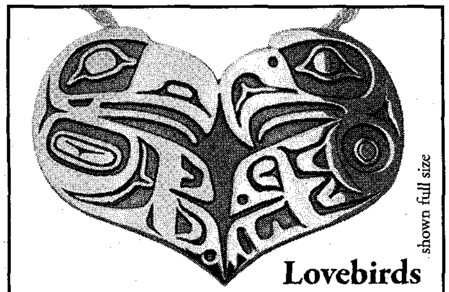

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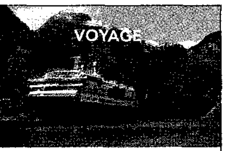

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SEVENTY-TWO VIRGINS

BY STEVE MARTIN

Virgin No. 1: *Yuck.*

Virgin No. 2: *Ick.*

Virgin No. 3: *Ew.*

Virgin No. 4: *Ow.*

Virgin No. 5: Do you like cats? I have fourteen!

Virgin No. 6: I'm Becky. I'll be legal in two years.

Virgin No. 7: Here, I'll just pull down your zipper. Oh, sorry!

Virgin No. 8: Can we cuddle first?

Virgin No. 9: It was a garlic-and-onion pizza. Why?

Virgin No. 10: . . . so I see Heath, and he goes, "Like, what are you doing here?," and I go, "I'm hangin' out," so he goes, "Like, what?" . . .

Virgin No. 11: First you're going to have to show me an up-to-date health certificate.

Virgin No. 12: Hurry! My parents are due home!

Virgin No. 13: Do you want the regular or the special?

Virgin No. 14: I'm eighty-four. So what?

Virgin No. 15: *Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!*

Virgin No. 16: Even *I* know that's tiny.

Virgin No. 17: "Do it"? Meaning what?

Virgin No. 18: I'm saving myself for Jesus.

Virgin No. 19: Somewhere on my body I have hidden a buffalo nickel.

Virgin No. 20: Don't touch my hair!

Virgin No. 21: I hope you're not going to sleep with me and then go sleep with seventy-one others.

Virgin No. 22: Do you mind if we listen to Mannheim Steamroller?

Virgin No. 23: Are you O.K. with the dog on the bed?

Virgin No. 24: Would you mind saying, "Could I see you in my office, Miss Witherspoon?"?

Virgin No. 25: Ride me! Ride me, Lucky Buck!

Virgin No. 26: You like your vanilla hot?

Virgin No. 27: Does Ookums like Snookums?

Virgin No. 28: It's so romantic here, dead.

Virgin No. 29: Well, *I'm* a virgin, but my hand isn't.

Virgin No. 30: You *are* in?

Virgin No. 31: Hi, cowboy. I just rode down from Brokeback Mountain.

Virgin No. 32: I'm a virgin because I'm so ugly.

Virgin No. 33: You like-ee?

Virgin No. 34: I'll betcha you can't get an erection. Go on, impress me. C'mon, show me. *Show* me, big shot.

Virgin No. 35: By the way, here in Heaven "virgin" has a slightly different meaning. It means "chatty."

Virgin No. 36: Sure, I like you, but as a friend.

Virgin No. 37: No kissing. I save that for my boyfriend.

Virgin No. 38: I'm Zania, from the planet Xeron. My vagina is on my foot.

Virgin No. 39: It's a lesion, and, no, I don't know what kind.

Virgin No. 40: I'm Jewish. Why do you ask?

Virgin No. 41: Hi, I'm Becky. Oh, whoops—you again.

Virgin No. 42: I just love camping! Camping is so great! Can we go camping sometime?

Virgin No. 43: In the spirit of full disclosure, I'm a single mom.

Virgin No. 44: You like my breasts? They were my graduation gift.

Virgin No. 45: When you're done, you should really check out how cool this ceiling is.

Virgin No. 46: I'm almost there. Just another couple of hours.

Virgin No. 47: Get your own beer, you nitwit.

Virgin No. 48: No, you've got it wrong. We're in the Paradise Casino.

Virgin No. 49: I really enjoyed that. Thank you very much. Gee, it's late.

Virgin No. 50: You make me feel like a real woman. And after this is over I'm going to find one.

Virgin No. 51: What do you mean, "move a little"?

Virgin No. 52: Not now, I'm on my BlackBerry.

Virgin No. 53: I love it when you put on your pants and leave.

Virgin No. 54: We've been together twenty-four hours now, and, you know, sometimes it's O.K. to say something mildly humorous.

Virgin No. 55: That was terrible. I should have listened to the other virgins.

Virgin No. 56: I think I found it. Is that it? Oh. Is this it? Oh, this must be it. No?

Virgin No. 57: It must be hot in here, because I know it's not me.

Virgin No. 58: Those are my testicles.

Virgin No. 59: Did you know that "virgin" is an anagram of Irving?

Virgin No. 60: First "Spamalot," then sex.

Virgin No. 61: Great! I was hoping for circumcised.

Virgin No. 62: Was that it?

Virgin No. 63: Dang. George Clooney was being reckless on a motorcycle, but instead I got you.

Virgin No. 64: Tonight, I become a woman. But until then you can call me Bob.

Virgin No. 65: They're called "adult diapers." Why?

Virgin No. 66: We could do it here for free, or on a stage in Düsseldorf for money.

Virgin No. 67: I'm just Virgin No. 67 to you, right?

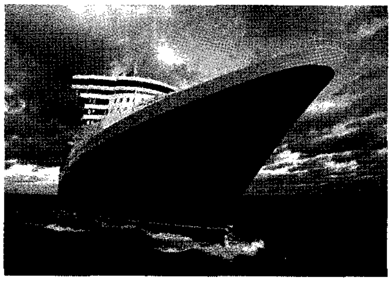
Virgin No. 68: *Pee-yoo.* Are you wearing Aramis?

Virgin No. 69: Condom, please.

Virgin No. 70: My name is Mother Teresa.

Virgin No. 71: I'm not very good at this, but let's start with the Reverse Lotus Blossom.

Virgin No. 72: It *was* paradise, until you showed up. ♦



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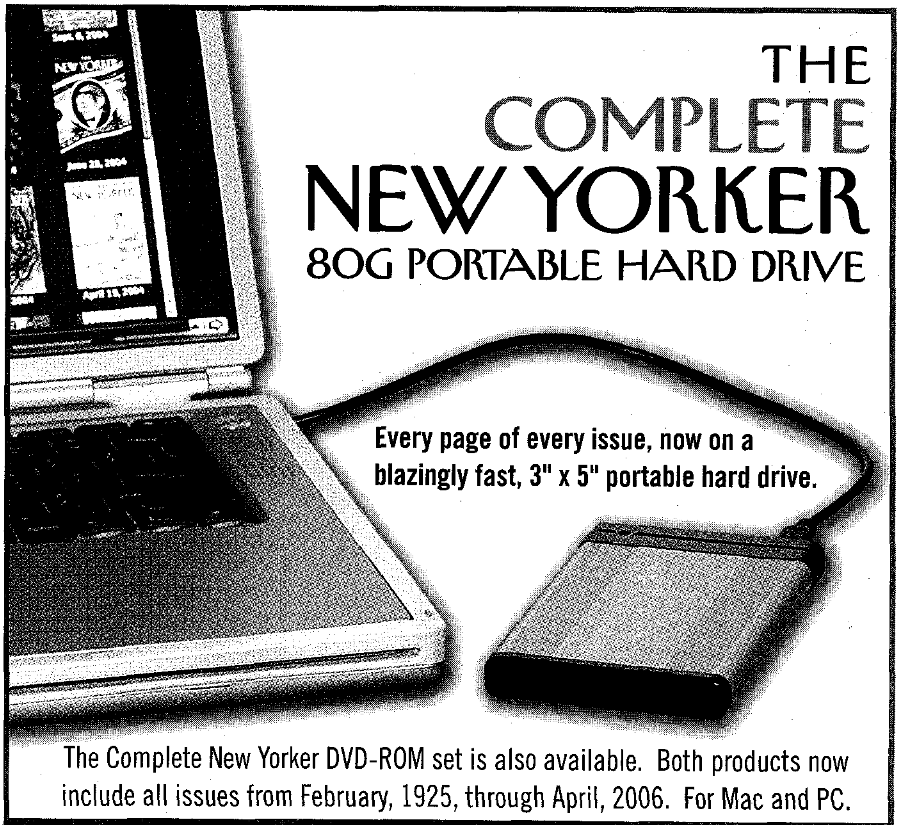

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REFLECTIONS

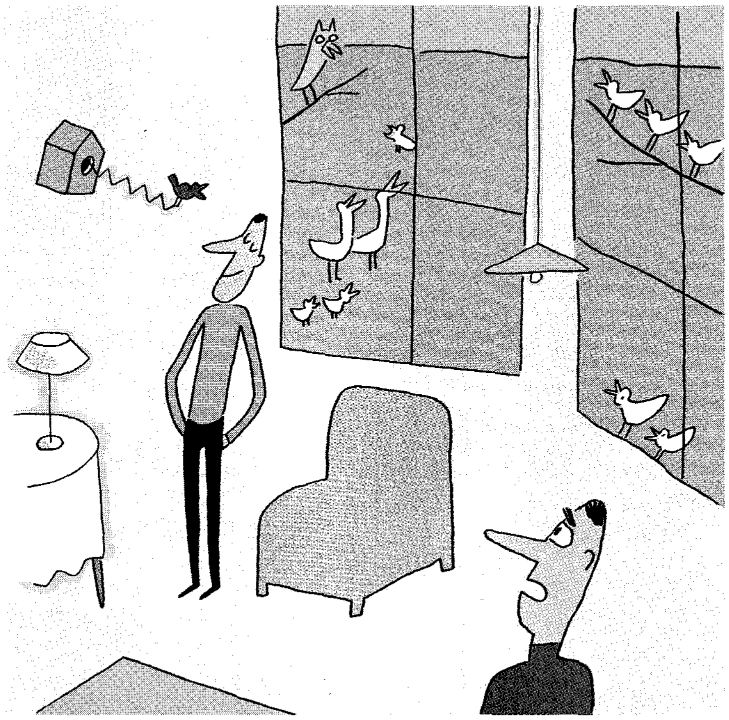
THE BIRDS

Why did they want to come in?

BY DAVID SEDARIS

The latest Kate Bush CD includes a song called "Aerial," and one spring afternoon Hugh sat down to listen to it. In the city, I'm forever nagging him about the volume. "The neighbors!" I say. But out in Normandy I have to admit that it's me who's being disturbed. The music I can usually live with—it's the lyrics I find irritating, especially when I'm at my desk and am looking for a reason to feel distracted. If one line ends with, say, the word "stranger," I'll try to second-guess the corresponding rhyme. "Danger," I'll think, then, No, wait, this is a Christmas album: "manger." The word will be "manger."

If I guess correctly, the songwriter will be cursed for his predictability, and if I guess incorrectly he's being willfully obtuse, a word I learned from my publisher, who applied it to the title of my last book. It's a no-win situation that's made even worse when the lyrics are unintelligible, the voice a shriek embedded in noise. This makes me feel both cranky *and* old, the type of pill who says things like "You and that rock!"



There are singers Hugh's not allowed to listen to while I'm in the house, but Kate Bush isn't one of them, or at least she wasn't until recently. The song I mentioned, "Aerial," opens with the trilling of birds. This might be startling if you lived in the city, but in Normandy it's all we ever hear: a constant din of chirps and whistles that may grow fainter at certain times of year but never goes away. It's like living in an aviary. Added to the calls of larks and swallows are those of the geese and chickens that live across the road. After they've all gone to bed, the owls come out and raise hell until dawn, when the whole thing starts over again.

The Kate Bush song had been playing for all of thirty seconds when we heard an odd noise and turned to see a bird rapping its beak against the windowpane. A moment later, its identical twin appeared at the adjacent window and began to do the same thing. Had they knocked once or twice, I'd have chalked it up to an accident, but these two were really going at it, like woodpeckers, almost. "What's got into them?" I asked.

Hugh turned to the liner notes, hoping to find some sort of explanation. "Maybe the recorded birds are saying something about free food," he suggested, but to me the message seemed much darker: a call to anarchy, or even murder. Some might think this was crazy, but I'd been keeping my ear to the ground and had learned that birds are not as carefree as they're cracked up to be. Take the crows that descend each winter on the surrounding fields and pluck the eyes out of newborn lambs. Are they so hard up for a snack that they have to blind a universal symbol of youth and innocence, or are they simply evil, a quality they possibly share with these two things at the window?

"What do you *want* from us?" I asked, and, rather than peck, the birds stepped back into the flower box, getting a little traction before hurling themselves against the glass.

"They'll wear themselves out sooner or later," Hugh said. But they didn't, not even after the clouds moved in and it began to rain. By late afternoon, they were still at it, soaking wet, but no less determined. I was lying on the daybed, working a crossword puzzle and listening to the distinct sound of feathers against glass. Every two minutes, I'd put aside my paper and walk across the room. "You think it's so great in here?" I'd say. "You think we've got something you can't live without?" At my approach, the birds would fly away, returning the moment I'd settled back down. Then I'd say, "All right, if you really want to come in that badly."

But the two lost interest as soon as the windows were open. And so I'd close them again, and return to my puzzle, at which point the birds would reappear and continue their assault. Then I'd say, "All right, if you really want to come in that badly—"

Einstein wrote that insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. That said, is it crazier to repeatedly throw yourself against a window, or to repeatedly *open* that window, believing the creatures that are throwing themselves against it might come into your house, take a look around, and leave with no hard feelings?

I considered this as I leafed through "Birds of the World," a visual guide as thick as a dictionary. After learning of

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

the Philippine Eagle—a heartless predator whose diet consists of monkeys—I identified the things at the window as chaffinches. The size was about right, six inches from head to tail, longish legs, pink breast, and crooked white bands running along the wings. The book explained that they eat seeds and insects. It stated that some chaffinches prefer to winter in India, or North Africa, but it did not explain why they were trying to get into my house.

"Could it be something they picked up in Africa?" I wondered. And Hugh, who had lived there until his late teens, said, "Why are you asking me?"

When the sun finally set, the birds went away, but they were at it again the following morning. Between their running starts and their pitiful back-assed tumbles, the flowers in the window box were trashed—petals and bits of stem scattered everywhere. There were scratch marks on the windowpanes, along with what I'm guessing was saliva, the thick, bubbly kind that forms when you're enraged.

"What do we do now?" I asked.

And Hugh told me to ignore them. "They just want attention." This is his explanation for everything from rowdy children to low-flying planes. "Turn the other way and they'll leave," he told me.

But how could I turn away?

The solution, it seemed, was to make some kind of scarecrow, which is not a bad project if you're in the proper mood. My first attempt involved an upside-down broom and a paper bag, which I placed over the bristles and drew an angry face on. For hair, I used a knot of steel wool. This made the figure look old and powerless, an overly tanned grandma, mad because she had no arms. The birds thought it was funny, and after chuckling for a moment or two they took a step back and charged against the window.

Plan B was much easier, and involved nothing more than a climb to the attic, which Hugh uses as his studio. A few years earlier, bored, and in between projects, he started copying head shots he'd clipped from the newspaper. The resulting portraits were done in different styles, but the ones that best suited my purposes looked to be Mesopotamian, and pictured the hijackers of American Airlines Flight 11. Mohamed Atta fit perfectly into the windowpane, and the effect was immediate. The birds flew up, saw a terrorist staring back at them, and took off screaming.

I was feeling very satisfied with myself when I heard a thud coming from behind a closed curtain next to the bookcase. Another trip upstairs, another hijacker, and so on, until all five living-room windows were secured. It was then that the birds focussed their attention on the bedroom, and I had no choice but to return to the attic.

Aside from CDs, which Hugh buys like candy, he also has a pretty big record collection. Most are albums that he bought in his youth and shipped to Normandy against my better wishes. "Led Zeppelin II," Pink Floyd's "Dark Side of the Moon": if it played non-stop in a skanky-smelling dorm room, he's got it. I come home from my five-o'clock walk, and here's Toto or Bad Company blaring from the attic. "Turn that crap off!" I yell, but of course Hugh can't hear me. So I go up, and there he is, positioned before his easel, one foot rigid on the floor, and the other keeping time with some guy in a spandex jumpsuit.

"Do you mind?" I say.

I never thought I would appreciate his music collection, but the chaffinches changed all that. What I needed were record jackets picturing life-sized heads, so I started with the "A"s and worked my way through the stack of boxes. The surprise was that some of Hugh's albums weren't so bad. "I didn't know he had this," I said, and I raced downstairs to prop Roberta Flack in the bedroom window. This was the cover of "Chapter Two," and while, to me, the singer looked inviting, the birds thought differently and moved on to a room that once functioned as a milking parlor. There I filled the windows with Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Joan Armatrading, and Donna Summer, who has her minuses but can really put the fear of God into a chaffinch.

The pair then moved upstairs to my office, where Janis Joplin and I were waiting for them. Bonnie Raitt and Rodney Crowell were standing by in case there was trouble with the skylights, but, strangely, the birds had no

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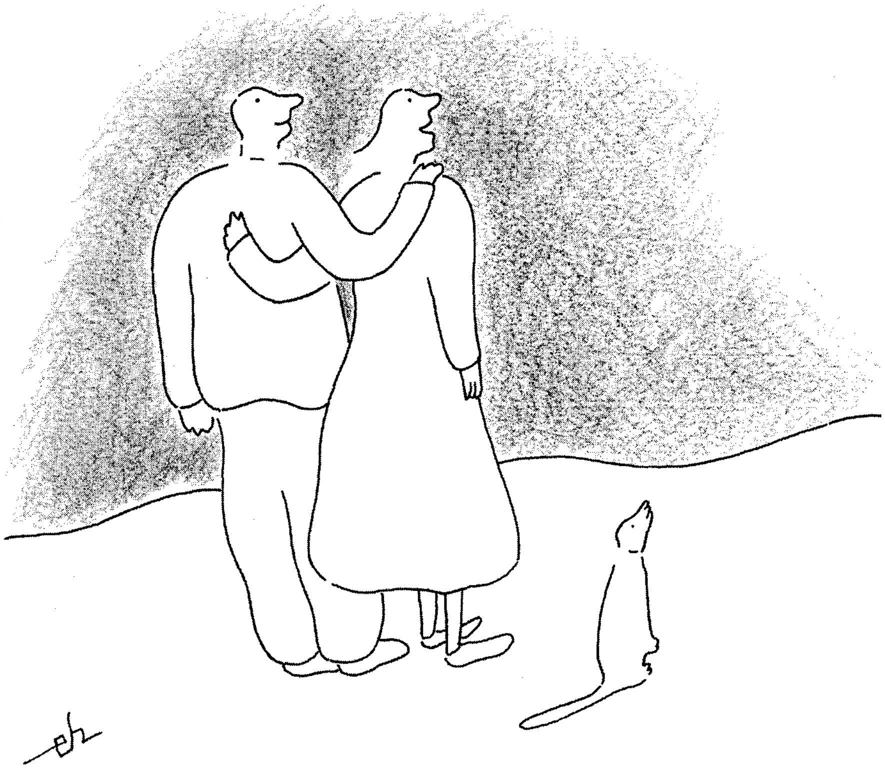

"I'm not religious—I'm just scared."

• •

interest in them. Horizontal surfaces were not their thing, and so they flew on to the bathroom.

By late afternoon, every window was filled. The storm clouds that had appeared the previous day finally blew off, and I was able to walk to the neighboring village. The route I normally take is circular, and leads past a stucco house occupied by a frail elderly couple. For years, they raised rabbits in their front yard, but last summer they either ate them, which is normal in this area, or turned them loose, which is unheard of. Then they got rid of the pen, and built a clumsy wooden shed in its place. A few months later, a cage appeared on its doorstep. It was the type you might keep a rodent in, but instead of a guinea pig they use it to hold a pair of full-grown magpies. They're good-sized birds—almost as tall as crows—and their quarters are much too small for them. Unlike parakeets, which will eventually settle down, the magpies are constantly searching for a way out, and move as if they were on fire—darting from one end of the cage to the other and banging their heads against the wire ceiling.

Their desperation is contagious, and watching them causes my pulse to quicken. Being locked up is one thing, but to have no concept of confinement, to be ignorant of its terms, and never understand that struggle is useless—that's what Hell must be like. The magpies leave me feeling so depressed and anxious that I wonder how I can possibly make it the rest of the way home. I always do, though, and it's always a welcome sight, especially lately. At around seven, the light settles on the western wall of our house, just catching two of the hijackers and a half-dozen singer-songwriters who look out from the windows, some smiling, as if they were happy to see me, and others just staring into space, the way one might while listening to music, or waiting, halfheartedly, for something to happen. ♦

CORRECTION OF THE WEEK

From the Times.

An article in The Arts on Tuesday about the most popular movies of 2006 and others that did not do as well at the box office referred incorrectly to two languages spoken in "Babel," one of the films with subtitles that did not draw big crowds. They are Spanish and Berber, not "Mexican" and "Moroccan."

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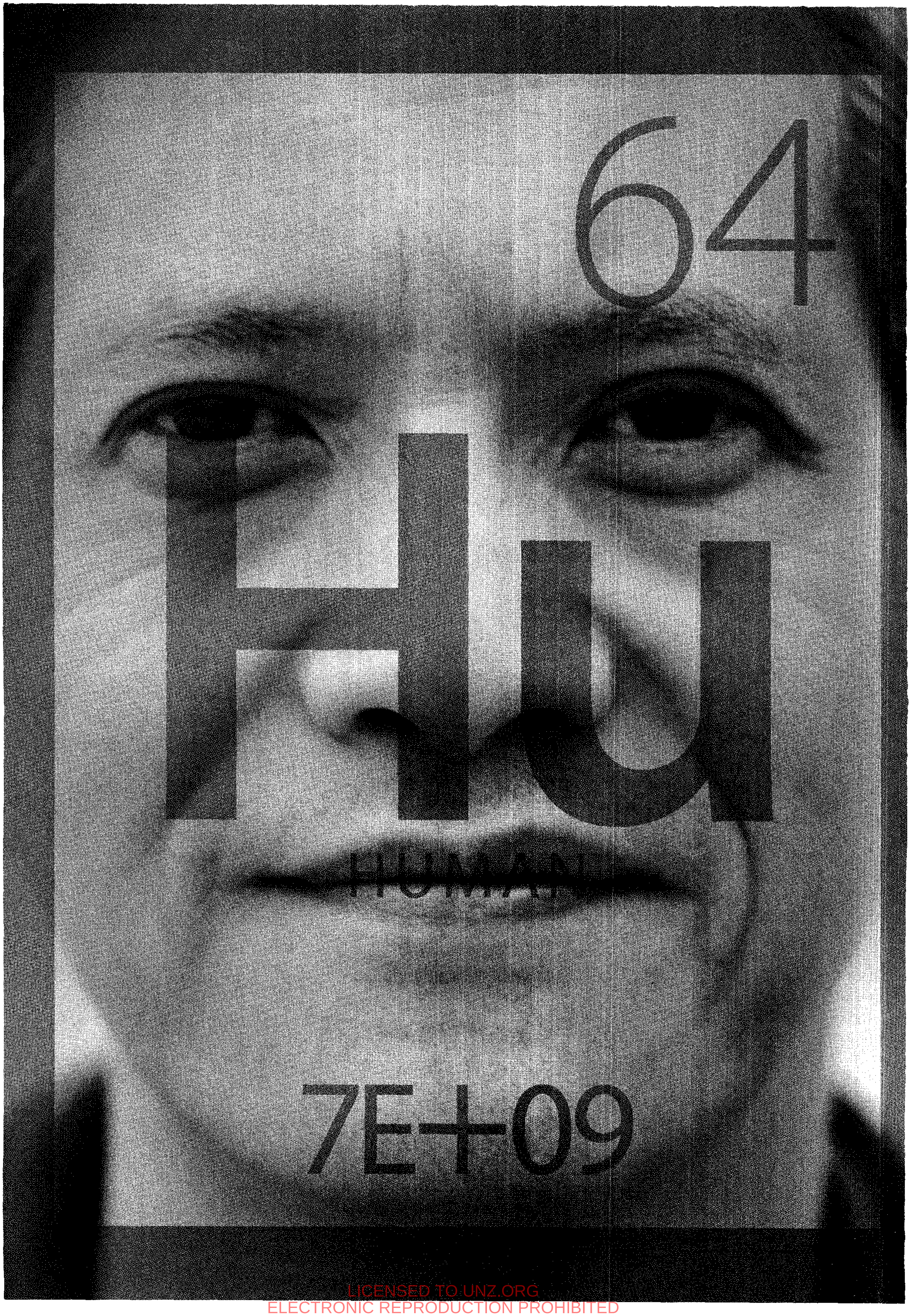
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LETTER FROM MOSCOW

KREMLIN, INC.

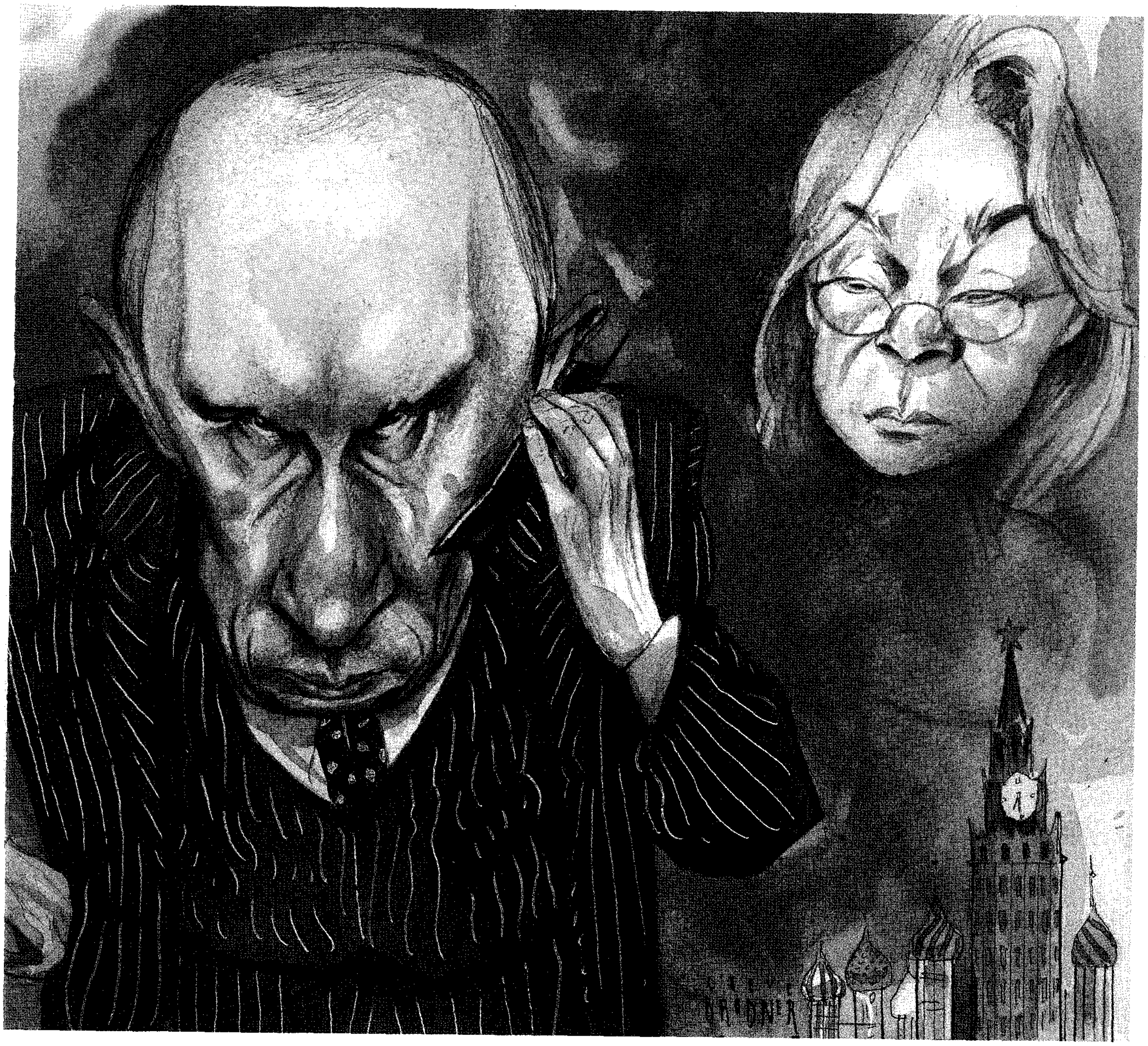
Why are Vladimir Putin's opponents dying?

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Saturday, October 7th, was a marathon of disheartening tasks for Anna Politkovskaya. Two weeks earlier, her father, a retired diplomat, had died of a heart attack as he emerged from the Moscow Metro while on his way to visit Politkovskaya's mother, Raisa Mazepa, in the hospital. She had just been diagnosed with cancer and was too weak even to attend her husband's funeral. "Your father will forgive me, because he knows that I have always loved him," she told Anna and her sister, Elena Kudimova, the day he was buried. A week later, she underwent surgery, and since then Anna and Elena had been taking turns helping her cope with her grief.

Politkovskaya was supposed to spend the day at the hospital, but her twenty-six-year-old daughter, who was pregnant, had just moved into Politkovskaya's apartment, on Lesnaya Street, while her own place was being prepared for the baby. "Anna had so much on her mind," Elena Kudimova told me when we met in London, before Christmas. "And she was trying to finish her article." Politkovskaya

STEVE BRODNER



was a special correspondent for the small liberal newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, and, like most of her work, the piece focussed on the terror that pervades the southern republic of Chechnya. This time, she had been trying to document repeated acts of torture carried out by squads loyal to the pro-Russian Prime Minister, Ramzan Kadyrov. In the past seven years, Politkovskaya had written dozens of accounts of life during wartime; many had been collected in her book "A Small Corner of Hell: Dispatches from Chechnya." Politkovskaya was far more likely to spend time in a hospital than on a battlefield, and her writing bore frequent witness to robbery, rape, and the unbridled cruelty of life in a place that few other Russians—and almost no other reporters—cared to think about. One day at the Ninth Municipal Hospital, in Grozny, Politkovskaya encountered a sixty-two-year-old woman named Aishat Suleimanova, whose eyes expressed "complete indifference to the world," she wrote in a typical piece. "And it is beyond one's strength to look at her naked body. She's been disembowelled like a chicken. The surgeons have cut into her from above her chest to her groin." Two weeks earlier, a "young fellow in a Russian serviceman's uniform put Aishat on a bed in her own house and shot five 5.45-mm. bullets into her. These bullets, weighted at the edges, have been forbidden by all international conventions as inhumane."

In the West, Politkovskaya's honesty brought her a measure of fame and a string of awards, bestowed at ceremonies in hotel ballrooms from New York to Stockholm. At home, she had none of that. Her excoriations of Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, insured isolation, harassment, and, many predicted, death. "I am a pariah," she wrote in an essay last year. "That is the result of my journalism through the years of the Second Chechen War, and of publishing books abroad

Vladimir Putin, the former K.G.B. agent Alexander Litvinenko, and the journalists Paul Klebnikov and Anna Politkovskaya.

FACE YOUR DEMONS.
TAKE A PILL.
MATTEWS

GOOD SHRINK, BAD SHRINK

about life in Russia." Despite the fact that Politkovskaya was articulate, attractive, and accomplished, she was barred from appearing on television, which is the only way the vast majority of Russians get news. To the degree that a living woman could be airbrushed out of post-Soviet history, she had been. "People call the newspaper and send letters with one and the same question: 'Why are you writing about this? Why are you scaring us?'" she wrote. "'Why do we need to know this?'" She provided an answer as much for herself as for any reader: "I'm sure this has to be done, for one simple reason: as contemporaries of this war, we will be held responsible for it. The classic Soviet excuse of not being there and not taking part in anything personally won't work. So I want you to know the truth. Then you'll be free of cynicism."

That afternoon, Politkovskaya drove to a supermarket near her mother's apartment, on the Frunzenskaya Embankment. Her daughter had planned to meet her there but was delayed. Nonetheless, as a surveillance camera at the store later showed, Politkovskaya was not alone. A young woman and a tall, slender man whose face was obscured by a baseball cap lurked in the aisles as she shopped. When Politkovskaya finished, she drove home in her silver Vaz 2110 and parked a few feet from the entrance to her building. She carried two bags of groceries up to her apartment, on the seventh floor, in the building's tiny elevator and dropped them at the door. Then she went down to fetch the rest of her parcels. When the elevator opened on the ground floor, her killer was waiting. He shot her four times—the first two bullets piercing her heart and lungs, the third shattering her shoulder, with a force that drove Politkovskaya back into the elevator. He then administered what is referred to in Moscow, where contract killings have become routine, as the *kontrolnyi vystrel*—the control shot. He fired a bullet into her head from inches away. Then he dropped his weapon, a plastic 9-mm. Makarov pistol whose serial number had been filed away, and slipped into the darkening afternoon.

The murder of Anna Politkovskaya was at once unbelievable and utterly expected. She had been hunted and attacked before. In 2001, she fled to Vienna after receiving e-mailed threats claiming that a special-services police officer whom she had accused of committing atrocities against civilians (and who was eventually convicted of the crimes) was bent on revenge. While she was abroad, a woman who looked very much like her was shot and killed in front of Politkovskaya's Moscow apartment building. Police investigators believe the bullet was meant for Politkovskaya. In 2004, she became violently ill after drinking tea on a flight to Beslan, in North Ossetia, where, at the request of Chechen leaders, she was to negotiate with terrorists who had seized a school and taken more than eleven hundred hostages, most of them children. The Russian Army, which had bungled its response to the siege, did not want her there. Upon landing in Rostov, she was rushed to the hospital; the next day, she was flown by private jet to Moscow for treatment. By the time she arrived, her blood-test results and other medical records had somehow disappeared. She survived, only to be called a "midwife to terror." The threats became continuous: calls in the middle of the night, letters, e-mails, all ominous, all promising the worst. "Anna knew the risks only too well," her sister told me. Politkovskaya was born in New York while her father was serving at the United Nations, in 1958; not long ago, her family persuaded her to obtain an American passport. "But that was as far as she would go," Kudimova said. "We all begged her to stop. We begged. My parents. Her editors. Her children. But she always answered the same way: 'How could I live with myself if I didn't write the truth?'"

Since 1999, when Vladimir Putin, a career K.G.B. officer, was, in effect, anointed as President by Boris Yeltsin, thirteen journalists have been murdered in Russia. Nearly all the deaths took place in strange circumstances, and none of them have been successfully investigated or prosecuted. In July, 2003, the investigative reporter Yuri Shchekochikhin, a well-known colleague of Politkovskaya's at *Novaya Gazeta*, died of what doctors described as an "allergic reaction." Shchekochikhin, who became famous in the Gorbachev era with his reports on the rise of a new mafia, had been investigating allegations of tax evasion against people with links to the F.S.B., the post-Soviet K.G.B. Nobody ever explained what Shchekochikhin was allergic to, and his family is convinced that he was poisoned. On July 9, 2004, Paul Klebnikov, the founding editor of the Russian edition of *Forbes*—who had made powerful enemies by investigating corruption among Russian business tycoons—was shot dead as he left his Moscow office.

The attacks have not been limited to journalists. In September of 2004, Viktor Yushchenko, a candidate for President of Ukraine who helped lead the Orange Revolution, and who was vigorously opposed by Putin, barely survived a poisoning. Doctors determined that he had been given the deadly chemical dioxin, which left his face disfigured and his health severely impaired. Since then, two members of the Duma, the Russian parliament, have been assassinated, and last September Andrei Kozlov, the deputy chief of Russia's central bank, was shot outside a Moscow stadium following a company soccer match. Kozlov had initiated a highly visible effort to rid the country of banks that were little more than fronts for organized crime. And just a few weeks ago, in an execution that could have been planned by Al Capone, Movladi Baisarov, a former Chechen special-forces officer who had come to be seen by Kadyrov as a rival, was gunned down on Leninsky Prospekt, one of Moscow's busiest thoroughfares. A series of control shots were administered in front of scores of witnesses, including high-ranking members of the police force. No arrests have been made.

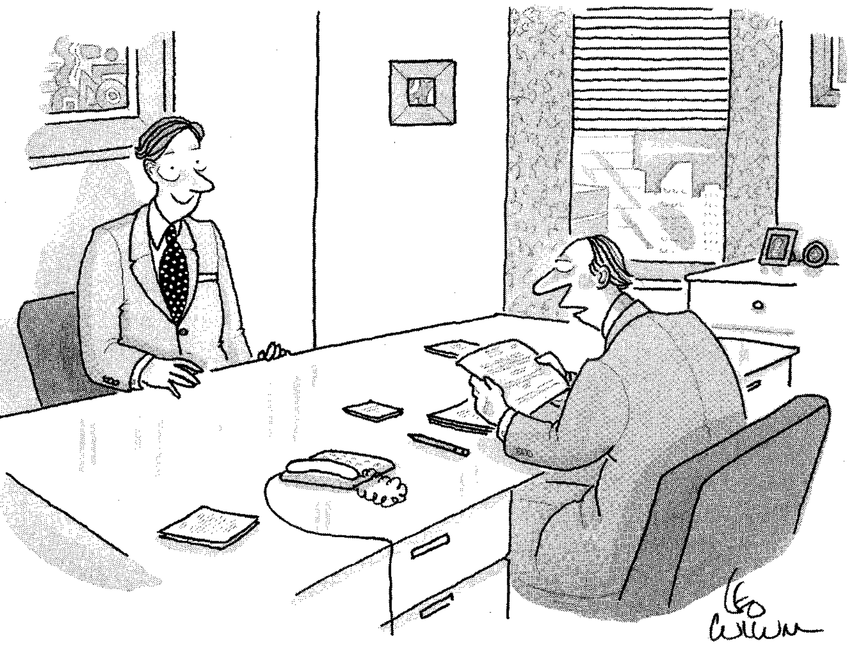
Four weeks after Politkovskaya died, Alexander Litvinenko, a little-known former K.G.B. agent who had been imprisoned by Putin and had then defected to England, fell gravely ill in London. Like many others, including Politkovskaya, Litvinenko had accused the Russian President of creating a pretext for the Second Chechen War in 1999 by blowing up buildings in Moscow and then blaming Chechen separatists for the attacks. Putin's decisive response to those acts of terrorism propelled him toward immense and lasting popularity. He was outraged by Litvinenko's accusation and equally angered that Litvinenko had fallen into the orbit of Boris Berezovsky, one of his most despised enemies. Berezovsky, a shady billionaire oligarch, wielded huge power in the Yeltsin years, helped bring Putin to Yeltsin's attention, and even played a major role in persuading him to assume the Presidency. Once Putin took power, though, Berezovsky found himself shut off from the Kremlin; he accused Putin of turning his back on Yeltsin's reforms, and was driven from the country. Litvinenko subsequently charged that his F.S.B. superiors had ordered him to kill Berezovsky. On his deathbed, he lashed out at Putin, saying, "You have shown yourself to be as barbaric and ruthless as your most hostile critics have claimed."

The manner of Litvinenko's poisoning was obscure almost until the moment he died. At first, doctors thought that he had an unusual bacterial infection; then they said that his symptoms pointed toward rat poison. When his immune system started to fail, they thought it more likely that the poison was a radioactive form of thallium, which had been used by the K.G.B. nearly fifty years earlier in a failed attempt to assassinate Nikolai Khokhlov, an agent who had refused to comply with an order to kill a prominent Russian dissident. Finally, just hours before Litvinenko died, the doctors provided a definitive and even more improbable diagnosis: he had been poisoned with polonium 210, a rare radioactive isotope; a millionth of a gram is enough to destroy a person's bodily organs. Litvinenko's murder was the first known case of nuclear terrorism perpetrated against an individual.

In Moscow, a city given to conspiracy theories, people could speak of little else: Putin had acted to silence a vocal traitor; no, Putin's enemies did it, to destroy the image of the Kremlin and gain leverage in the 2008 Presidential campaign; Putin's allies did it, so that they could use the affair as a convenient excuse to ignore the constitution and secure him a third term; the "Jews" did it, because Litvinenko had converted to Islam; Muslim extremists did it, because Litvinenko had reneged on a promise to supply parts for a dirty bomb; Berezovsky did it, to embarrass Putin. The Kremlin even suggested that Leonid Nevzlin, a wealthy oil executive who fled Russia and lives in Israel, might have been involved. There was no proof for any of these assertions. Last July, however, the Duma passed a law, introduced by the Kremlin, to permit the assassination of "enemies of the Russian regime" abroad. For people like Boris Berezovsky, whose hatred for Putin has become an obsession, the new law explained everything.

"This guy is a K.G.B. guy," Berezovsky told me one afternoon over tea at a London hotel. "This guy issues a law allowing the Russians to kill opponents abroad. *So they kill opponents abroad.*" His voice rose, and he shrugged, and then he glanced at me as if to say, How could one draw any other conclusion? "This is absolutely logical. Why did they issue this law? For what? Because this is Russia and nobody agrees to kill without the signature of somebody more important who gave the order." The Kremlin has denied any involvement in Litvinenko's death. Whatever the truth, the manner in which he died has tarnished Putin's reputation in the West. And so has the execution of a journalist who had been accused of nothing more than doing her job.

At first, Putin, like most other Rus-



"I see that, in college, you got along equally well with the jocks and the stoners."

A memorial for Anna Politkovskaya in St. Petersburg. "How could I live with myself if I didn't write the truth?" she asked.

sians, tried to ignore the Politkovskaya murder. He refused even to make a gesture of sympathy. As mourners gathered at services in Helsinki, Paris, and New York, and as many others—most of them members of Moscow's dwindling liberal establishment—laid flowers on the doorstep of Politkovskaya's apartment building and attended her funeral, at the Troyekurovskoye Cemetery, on the outskirts of Moscow, the President said nothing. On October 10th, he travelled to Dresden (where he had been stationed as a K.G.B. operative in the eighties) for a meeting with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Afterward, they appeared at a press conference, and Putin was no longer able to avoid questions about the killing. He responded curtly, "She was well known in the media community, in human-rights circles, and in the West, but her influence on political life within Russia was very minimal. . . . In my opinion, she was too radical, and by virtue of this radicalism she did not have a very strong influence on political life within the country, and especially in Chechnya."

The President's detached and clinical approach to the murder infuriated Politkovskaya's colleagues and shocked her family. "It was like he was saying she was of no value to the Kremlin, so she didn't deserve to live," Elena Kudimova told me. "I don't care what he thought of her work, but what kind of man speaks that way about the dead?"

In the late nineteen-eighties, at the urging of Mikhail Gorbachev's Kremlin, Communist newspapers began publishing exposés of Russian politics and the war in Afghanistan, and stories about many of the "blank spots" of Soviet history, going back to Lenin. The dull, formulaic journals of Soviet life—*Izvestia, Literaturnaya Gazeta, Ogonyok,* and *Moscow News*—suddenly became engrossing. Each morning, huge crowds would gather in Pushkin Square to read the papers, discuss the events of the day, and argue about what might come next. New papers were starting to appear as well; the first, and best, was *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. By the end of the decade, the distinctly capitalist business journal *Kommersant* had also appeared, first weekly, then every day. Although truth, rather than profits, was the priority in that brief, emotional, and highly romantic period, circulations remained large, because people were still hungry for genuine information about their own lives and history.

DMITRY LOVETSKY/AP

Euphoria cannot sustain a business, however. When Yeltsin instituted the economic reforms known as "shock therapy," in 1992, prices soared and the costs of publishing a newspaper became prohibitive. There were no advertisements, and subscriptions all but evaporated, along with whatever innocence remained. The moral tone of the journalistic world began to shift, from idealistic to mercenary. The practice of writing biased news articles for money became routine even at the best papers. Restaurant owners, businessmen, and public officials knew that the right price would bring them favorable coverage almost anywhere. "It would be good to say we had our hands clean at all times," Raf Shakirov, who later became the editor of *Izvestia*, told me. "We tried. But it was done by everyone. Absolutely everyone."

As the process of Soviet disintegration accelerated, the Yeltsin government was consumed by economic and social chaos. Leaders of several Russian regions, including Siberia and Yakutia—both with vast reserves of diamonds, oil, and gold beneath their frozen ground—began to speak openly of seceding. One Soviet general, Dzhokhar Dudayev, watched from his post in Estonia as the Baltic republics demanded independence. He resigned his commission as commander of a strategic wing of nuclear bombers, went home to Grozny, and, after a dubious election, proclaimed himself the leader of an independent Chechnya. Boris Yeltsin did not take the Chechen threat seriously, but he began to worry that this rebellion, in a part of the country that had been hostile to Moscow for centuries, might set off similar demands in other republics. Yeltsin was struggling to keep the country together, and in 1993 he was even forced to turn his tanks against his own mutinous parliament.

By the end of the following year, Yeltsin had heard enough talk of Chechen independence. To those who encouraged the President to negotiate—as he had with Tatarstan and other regions seeking greater autonomy—Yeltsin replied by asking if the President of Russia should really be bargaining with "a bunch of shepherds." Pavel Grachev, the Defense Minister, promised that he could win a war against Dudayev's forces with one paratroop regiment "in two hours," and Yeltsin told him to go ahead. Instead, what became known as the First Chechen War dragged on for nearly two years. By the time it ended, in the summer of 1996, Grozny had been levelled, tens of thousands of Russians and Chechens had died, and Europe's largest army had been forced into a historic retreat.

Most Russians had quickly come to oppose the war in Chechnya, largely because of reports they saw on television, particularly on the NTV network. NTV was owned by Vladimir Gusinsky, one of the earliest Moscow "oligarchs." Its correspondents were fearless. "Those pictures created an overwhelming sense that the war was unjust and that Yeltsin had to end it," Masha Lipman, who was the deputy editor of Gusinsky's magazine *Itogi*, said. "It hurt him very badly—his popularity plummeted. The war was seen as cruel." For the first time, the Russian press had played a central role in altering the nation's political direction. Indeed, with the single exception of the economic windfall granted to a few well-placed men—oligarchs who were permitted to buy state property at ludicrously low prices—the war in Chechnya did more to unravel the promise of Yeltsin's Presidency than any other event.

By 1996, with a Presidential election scheduled, Yeltsin's popularity ratings had fallen into the single digits. He suffered from heart disease and other ailments, and was drinking heavily and behaving erratically. Just five years after the "collapse of Communism," the Communist candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, promising to bring back a stable, coherent past, seemed almost certain to win the Russian Presidency. To have even a hope of victory, Yeltsin was forced to sue for peace in Chechnya and form a political alliance with a gruff, theatrical, and very popular general, Alexander Lebed, who had openly and eloquently criticized the war. More important, just a few months earlier Yeltsin had made common cause with the Moscow oligarchs, including Berezovsky and Gusinsky, who set aside their rivalries to help the President. After all, he had made their fortunes possible, and they knew that a Russia led by Zyuganov would have no place for them. So the oligarchs and the journalists they employed conspired to pour limitless funds into Yeltsin's campaign, and insured that the networks would provide only favorable coverage.

The young liberals who worked at Moscow's newspapers and television stations, and had championed Yeltsin's rise during the Gorbachev years, were terrified that their new liberties would vanish under a neo-Communist government. For all his faults and his increasing malevolence, Yeltsin rarely challenged the right of the press to do its job in Chechnya or anywhere else. "Yeltsin was an opportunist, as every politician is," Igor Malashenko, the founding president of NTV, told me recently. "He had terrible personal flaws and made many mistakes. But he did not need to control everything. He had a visceral taste for democracy and for freedom. And he loved the mess." So, despite Yeltsin's precarious health, his loss of public support, and an inner circle riven by factional disputes and corruption, the most influential journalists in Russia—led by Malashenko and NTV—decided that nothing was more important than protecting Yeltsin's Presidency.

They wanted to drive Communism from Russia forever; impartiality, they felt, was too decorous a response to what they considered to be a national emergency. As a Moscow correspondent for the *Times*, I saw that many of my friends were certain that a Yeltsin loss would be a disaster for the country. One day, I travelled with the press corps to Novosibirsk, a center of Soviet-era science and scholarship, to watch Zyuganov campaign. He was attempting to convince people that their new freedoms were filled with false promises. At that time, factory salaries were often paid in dish towels, tires, or cheap cutlery. Inflation had rendered pensions almost worthless, and people in the crowd listened to Zyuganov with hope and relief. My friends in the Russian press, however, were disgusted. "We got rid of this shit," one of them told me that night, "and we are never going to let it back. Never." They wrote accordingly. Any suggestion that journalism shouldn't work that way was rebuffed with assertions that people in America and Europe had less at stake.

"When NTV was busy reëlecting Yeltsin, when he had two per cent and it magically went to fifty-four per cent, why didn't you in the West say, 'Careful, Russia, this will lead to a system you will regret'?" Leonid Parfyonov asked me recently. Until two years ago, Parfyonov was the nation's most influential television host, but he was abruptly fired after a dispute with the Kremlin over the censoring of his Sunday-night political news program. He is now the editor of the Russian edition of *Newsweek.* "No. We never got that from the West. You all said, 'Good job. Yeltsin good, Zyuganov bad.' You prevented the return of Communism as much as we did." That is true, no doubt. But when Russia's young democrats jettisoned the rules of democracy they also forfeited their independence. That made what came next for the media, and for Russia, possible—perhaps even inevitable.

The 1996 election "put a poison seed into the soil," Andrei Norkin, a former anchor for NTV, told me. Norkin now works for the satellite network RTV1, which is owned by Gusinsky. "And, even if we did not see why, the authorities understood at once: mass media could very easily be manipulated to achieve any goal. Whether the Kremlin needed to raise the rating of a President or bring down an opponent or conduct an operation to destroy a business, or a man, the media could do the job. Once the Kremlin understood that it could use journalists as instruments of its will, and saw that journalists would go along, everything that happened in the Putin era was, sadly, quite logical."

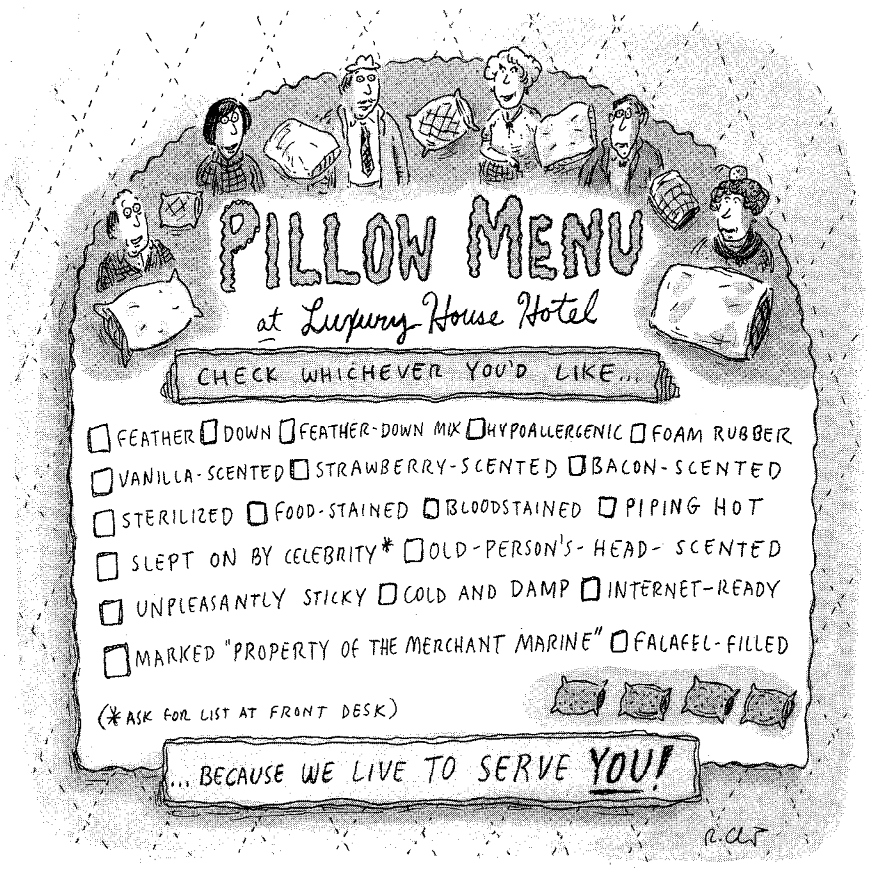
A few months before Putin became President, in 2000, there was a battle for control of parliament—and, by implication, the government—as Russia prepared for the end of Yeltsin's administration. One group was backed by the Kremlin and the other by former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov and the extraordinarily powerful mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov. The outcome was determined wholly by television coverage. Most newspapers had lost what influence they had had. Channel 1, the main state network, unleashed a barrage of biased, defamatory reports that destroyed Primakov in less than two months. As Alexander Rodnyansky, who is the head of CTC, one of Russia's major television networks, put it, "Television is the only reality in which we exist."

Putin had seen what true press freedom could accomplish during the First Chechen War, and he was not about to repeat Yeltsin's mistake. In 1999, after the explosions that terrorized Moscow and provided the rationale for instigating the Second Chechen War, the Kremlin quickly assumed control of essentially all television in Russia and responded harshly to those who tried to resist. On April 14, 2001, the state-controlled energy monolith, Gazprom, forcibly took over NTV—cutting Andrei Norkin off in the middle of a sentence as he tried to explain what was happening inside the studios. The screen filled with colored stripes. Igor Malashenko referred to the seizure—a decisive moment in the muffling of free speech in Russia—as "a creeping coup." Networks soon became wholly owned by the state or by companies—like Gazprom, which owns three networks and also *Izvestia*—that function as corporate arms of the government.

"If they invite us in, just politely decline."

Propaganda has become more sophisticated and possibly more effective than it was during the Soviet years, when television was a tool used to sustain an ideology. The goal today is simpler: to support the Kremlin and its corporate interests. "It's a magic process now," Anna Kachkaeva, who broadcasts a weekly interview show on Radio Liberty, told me. Kachkaeva, who is also the head of the Television Department at Moscow State University, went on, "There is no censorship—it's much more advanced. I would call it a system of contacts and agreements between the Kremlin and the heads of television networks. There is no need to start every day with instructions. It is all done with winks and nods. They meet at the end of the week, and the problem, for TV and even in the printed press, is that self-censorship is worse than any other kind. Journalists know—they can feel—what is allowed and what is not."

The Kremlin's relationship with this pliable, post-Soviet press corps becomes obvious in any political crisis. Last January, for example, every channel helped wage an information war against Ukraine during that country's price dispute with Gazprom. Oil and gas revenue is almost wholly responsible for Russia's current economic boom—not to mention the Kremlin's rapidly growing political confidence. Since Gazprom is the central instrument of that success, Putin keeps a careful watch on its interests. Dmitry Medvedev, the chairman of the Gazprom board, is also Putin's first deputy prime minister and a likely Presidential candidate next year. (Many commentators have wondered if he and Putin will simply switch jobs.) In the corporatist, semi-authoritarian structure that Putin has created—the Kremlin refers to it as "sovereign democracy"—what is good for Gazprom is good for Russia, and no Rus-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• •

sian television station would have dared to present the Ukrainian side of the story.

The Putin government has made a clever calculation: a few newspapers, with tiny élite audiences, can publish highly critical investigations and editorials as long as that reporting and criticism stays absolutely disconnected from television. (And as long as their journalists keep out of Chechnya.) Anna Politkovskaya began writing about the war in 1999, after the rules of press freedom changed, and she violated those rules every time she went to work. Not long before her death, she wrote, "I will not go into the . . . joys of the path I have chosen—the poisoning, the arrests, the threats in letters and over the Internet, the telephoned death threats, the weekly summons to the prosecutor general's office to sign statements about practically every article I write (the first question being 'How and where did you obtain this information?'). Of course I don't like the constant derisive articles about me that appear in other newspapers and on Web sites presenting me as the madwoman of Moscow. I find it disgusting to live this way. I would like a bit more understanding." The fact that *Novaya Gazeta* continued to exist says more about the paper's minimal impact than about its openness.

Politkovskaya, like many others, attributed the precipitate decline of press freedoms to Putin's background and his reflexes. In her book "Putin's Russia: Life in a Failing Democracy" (2004), she wrote that he is "a product of the country's murkiest intelligence service," and "has failed to transcend his origins and stop behaving like a K.G.B. officer." Putin has indeed presided over a remarkable resurgence in the power of the secret services, and many current Russian leaders are products of the K.G.B. and its successors.

"Reform of the K.G.B. never really happened," Evgenia Albats, a professor of political science at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, said a few weeks ago, after the deaths of Politkovskaya and Litvinenko. Albats has written more incisively about the K.G.B. than any other Russian journalist. "The organization was broken into several agencies in the early nineteen-nineties, but the reforms were abandoned, especially after Putin became President," she went on. "The K.G.B.'s capacity to be a political organization is back. And, unlike in the Soviet era, the secret services are now in full power."

Two stories dominated the news in Moscow just before Christmas: the centenary of Leonid Brezhnev's birth and the death of the Chilean autocrat General Augusto Pinochet. Both men received adoring attention on television and in newspapers. Brezhnev held power for eighteen years as General Secretary of the Communist Party in an era most notable for economic stagnation and human-rights abuses. And yet he has never been more in vogue. A poll taken last month by the daily paper *Moskovsky Komsomolets* found that "the overwhelming majority of Russia's people have very pleasant memories of Brezhnev's era and of Leonid Ilyich himself, who would have turned a hundred on December 19th." During the Brezhnev years, the decaying state was kept aloft almost exclusively by stratospherically high oil prices.

"Those years are now increasingly called the Golden Age of the great power, which preceded the turmoil of Gorbachev and Yeltsin—theirs was the age of a weak and lost Russia, ended by the return of Russia's past grandeur under President Putin," the columnist Sergey Strokan noted in *Kommersant.*

Like Brezhnev, Pinochet evoked a sense of stability, a lack of turmoil. Russia's most popular paper, *Komsomolskaya Pravda,* asked readers if the country needed its own Pinochet. The overwhelming response was yes. "We don't need a dictator," the liberal legislator Irina Khakamada wrote. "But we might need an economic Pinochet." Others were far more effusive. "Pinochet made an exemplary and glamorous nation out of Chile," one typical reader wrote. "Stable and strong."

Putin, who has called the breakup of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," clearly agrees. Sick of the lines, the empty shops, and the false promises of Soviet life, Russians looked first to the West—and particularly to the United States—to provide an economic model. What followed was an epic disaster: the sell-off of the state's most valuable assets made a few dozen people obscenely rich, but the lives of millions of others became far worse. The health-care system fell apart, and so did many of the social-service networks. Russia became the first industrial country ever to experience a sustained fall in life expectancy. Russian males born today can, on average, expect to live to the age of fifty-nine, dying younger than if they were born in Pakistan or Bangladesh. It is not surprising, then, that by the time Putin became President most Russians were only too happy to exchange the metaphysical ideas of free speech and intellectual freedom for the concrete desires of owning a home and a car and possessing a bank account. They also wanted to feel that somebody was in control of their country.

In today's Russia, as Politkovskaya wrote, stability is everything and damn the cost. Gorbachev and Yeltsin are seen by an overwhelming majority as historical disasters who provoked decline, collapse, chaos, and humiliation before the triumphal West. The opportunities created in those years, the liberation from totalitarianism, have been forgotten. "Yes, stability has come to Russia," Politkovskaya wrote. "It is a monstrous stability under which nobody seeks justice in courts that flaunt their subservience and partisanship. Nobody in his or her right mind seeks protection from the institutions entrusted with maintaining law and order, because they are totally corrupt. Lynch law is the order of the day, both in people's minds and in their actions. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."

NOON

They're not grown up—more like a boy and girl, really.
School's over. It's the best part of the summer, when it's still beginning—
the sun's shining, but the heat isn't intense yet.
And freedom hasn't gotten boring.

So you can spend the whole day, all of it, wandering in the meadow.
The meadow goes on indefinitely, and the village keeps getting more and more faint—

It seems a strange position, being very young.
They have this thing everyone wants and they *don't* want—
but they want to keep it anyway; it's all they can trade on.

When they're by themselves like this, these are the things they talk about.
How time for them doesn't race.
It's like the reel breaking at the movie theater. They stay anyway—
mainly, they just don't want to leave. But till the reel is fixed
the old one just gets popped back in,
and all of a sudden you're back to long ago in the movie—
the hero hasn't even met the heroine. He's still at the factory,
he hasn't begun to go bad. And she's wandering around the docks, already bad.
But she never meant it to happen. She was good, then it happened to her,
like a bag pulled over her head.

The sky's completely blue, so the grass is dry.
They'll be able to sit with no trouble.
They sit, they talk about everything—then they eat their picnic.
They put the food on the blanket, so it stays clean.
They've always done it this way; they take the grass themselves.

The rest—how two people can lie down on the blanket—
they know about it but they're not ready for it.
They know people who've done it, as a kind of game or trial—

Vladimir Putin's relationship with democracy is not ambiguous: in December of 2004, he signed a bill that effectively eliminated the election by popular vote of Russia's eighty-nine governors. The President now nominates them himself—and then waits for regional legislatures to confirm his choices (as they always do). In another change that nobody protested and few people noticed, Putin also assumed the power to appoint the mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg. Last November, again at the President's behest, the Duma abolished any requirement that a minimum number of voters must participate in order for an election to be valid.

"I don't know of a single case in the past six years when the Duma voted against any Presidential initiative," Vladimir Ryzhkov, one of the last liberal legislators willing to speak critically and publicly, told me. "I also don't know of any case where the Duma adopted an initiative that came from the regions. One man makes all the rules in Russia now, and the Duma has become like a new Supreme Soviet."

No company, foreign or domestic, can prevail in an argument with the Kremlin. That became clear on October 25, 2003, when armed and masked F.S.B. agents stormed a private jet and arrested Mikhail Khodorkovsky as he was about to depart from the Novosibirsk Airport, in Siberia. Khodorkovsky was Russia's richest and, after Putin himself, easily its most influential man. He ran Yukos, the largest—and, by most assessments, the best managed—oil company in the country. Khodorkovsky had failed to honor an unspoken pact with the Kremlin: stay out of politics and stay rich. Instead, he had begun to speak out, act independently, and support Putin's opponents. He even started appearing in foreign capitals—often acting more like a head of state than like an oil magnate. Khodorkovsky was charged with fraud and tax evasion, and was then convicted in a trial that few observers, in or out of Russia, believed was fair. He was sentenced to nine years in prison and is serving them at Prison Camp IZ-75/1, in Chita—one of Siberia's most remote and inhospitable regions. The Kremlin then set out to destroy his company, suing Yukos for billions of dollars in what it said were unpaid

then you say, no, wrong time, I think I'll just keep being a child.
But your body doesn't listen. It knows everything now,
it says you're not a child, you haven't been a child for a long time.

Their thinking is, stay away from change. It's an avalanche—
all the rocks sliding down the mountain, and the child standing underneath
just gets killed.

They sit in the best place, under the poplars.
And they talk—it must be hours now, the sun's in a different place.
About school, about people they both know,
about being adult, about how you knew what your dreams were.

They used to play games, but that's stopped now—too much touching.
They only touch each other when they fold the blanket.

They know this in each other.
That's why it isn't talked about.
Before they do anything like that, they'll need to know more—
in fact, everything that can happen. Until then, they'll just watch
and stay children.

Today she's folding the blanket alone, to be safe.
And he looks away—he pretends to be too lost in thought to help out.

They know that at some point you stop being children, and at that point
you become strangers. It seems unbearably lonely.

When they get home to the village, it's nearly twilight.
It's been a perfect day; they talk about this,
about when they'll have a chance to have a picnic again.

They walk through the summer dusk,
not holding hands but still telling each other everything.

—*Louise Glück*

taxes. Yukos's assets are being distributed among the President's allies, the biggest beneficiaries being the two companies that are sometimes referred to as the only meaningful political "parties" left in Russia: Gazprom and Rosneft, the state-run oil concern. (In December, the Kremlin began to assemble yet another case against Khodorkovsky, this time involving money laundering.)

The Russian government has become bolder and more assertive throughout Putin's tenure. On New Year's Day of 2006, Russia abruptly cut gas exports to Ukraine after the government there objected to a sharp rise in the prices charged by Gazprom. Gas headed to Europe from Russia passes through Ukraine, and the disruption—which was widely seen as punishment for Ukraine's political intransigence—affected many European countries. This month, Belarus was treated in the same fashion: Russia doubled the price it charges for gas and began to impose much higher export duties on oil. Putin clearly sees today's ideological battles in economic, rather than military, terms. Vladislav Surkov, who is essentially the Kremlin's chief ideologist, told delegates at a meeting of the President's party last year, "For all globalization's benefits, all the talk of friendship, the Americans count their dividends at home, the British count theirs—and we count ours. The majority count their losses. So when they tell us that sovereignty is outdated, as is the nation-state, we should ask ourselves what they are up to."

The Kremlin recently provided a particularly audacious example of how it sees its role as an "energy superpower": Royal Dutch Shell, which had invested billions of dollars to develop the world's largest oil-and-gas field, Sakhalin II, in the Russian Far East, was forced by the government to sell its controlling stake in the project. The company had endured a year of regulatory harassment—including absurd threats that the pipeline would not meet Russia's environmental standards. The moment Shell surrendered to Gazprom, however, those environmental concerns vanished. And what was Shell's response after its holding in the project was reduced from fifty-five per cent to twenty-five? "Thank you very much for your support," the company's chief executive, Jeroen van der Veer, told Putin at a meeting three weeks ago. "This was a historic occasion."

With thirty per cent of the world's gas exports, Russia can impose its will for one simple reason. "The entire world is obsessed with energy security and resources," Fyodor Lukyanov, the editor of the quarterly journal *Russia in Global Affairs,* told me. "You need it. We have it. It is up to us to decide how to deal with that. India and China are seeking new sources of energy to secure their very rapid growth. The U.S. is lost in its war in Iraq, the European Union has no idea what it is anymore. And then there is Russia: stable, wealthy, controlled very solidly. No opposition. There is really a feeling of superiority, a sense that Russia is now an indispensable nation, as Mrs. Albright said just a few years ago about the United States."

For the first time since the nineteen-eighties, when a steep drop in the price of oil brought on an economic crisis that helped destroy the Soviet Union, Russia feels truly independent. Throughout the nineties, every Russian leader, including Putin during the first years of his administration, was preoccupied with financial problems, in an attempt either to repair the broken Soviet economy or to respond to humanitarian crises or, finally, and most humiliatingly, to persuade the International Monetary Fund to help the country survive its birth. "Today, it is ridiculous to remember," Lukyanov said, "but through much of the nineties economic decisions in Russia could be taken only after consultation with the I.M.F.

"Hold it! We almost forgot your backdated stock options."

* * *

and sometimes after the approval of the American Embassy in Moscow. Russia was weak. Russia didn't know what to do. And today's greed is a reaction to all of that. To poverty and humiliation. Our official ideology is to make more money."

The gains of the past seven years have been remarkable, and, while the country's two great cities, Moscow and St. Petersburg, have benefitted most from the new wealth, the rest of the nation has not been left completely behind. A friend of mine recently visited Perm, at the base of the Ural Mountains, and he was astonished to find seven Italian restaurants in the city where a dinner I had about a decade ago consisted of an unsightly slab of cold meat and some deep-fried potatoes.

Moscow has changed even more. Parts of the city are coming to resemble colder versions of Riyadh or Dubai. One afternoon, as I walked to the Lenin Library from my hotel, I noticed that one of the library's main signs now shares space with another local landmark: Planet Sushi. Nearby, a few hundred yards from Red Square, is the Moscow Bentley, Ferrari, and Maserati dealership, and each new model seems to sell out faster than the one before.

Putin is proud of Russia's economic achievements, and he took advantage of the press conference in Germany where he spoke with so little passion about Anna Politkovskaya to describe them in detail. "When I became President, our foreign-currency and gold reserves stood at twelve billion dollars, and now they have increased by eighty billion over the first half of this year alone, and currently come to a total of around two hundred and seventy billion," he said. "We have paid off our debts in full. We have now become a grain-exporting country." He added, "But none of this would mean anything if it did not bring change to people's lives," noting that incomes and pensions have risen nearly ten per cent each year since he became President. Nevertheless, the country is literally dying. When Boris Yeltsin took office, the Russian population stood at nearly a hundred and fifty million. By 2050, most official projections suggest, the number may fall below a hundred million. In describing the new Russia, neither Putin nor his loyalists mention the country's rapidly expanding AIDS epidemic, its endemic alcoholism, or the vast differences in incomes among its citizens. Nor do they acknowledge that, despite the robust G.D.P., Russia's rankings on such essential global economic issues as competitiveness and labor efficiency are appallingly low.

"The majority of the population, they are absolutely happy," Alexei Volin, who served for three years as deputy chief of staff in Putin's government and now runs a highly successful publishing house, said when we met in Moscow. "They get more money. Consumption has increased two and a half times in the last six years. People are buying cars, country houses, they are going to big shopping malls—as big as those in the United States." Volin, a trim, clean-cut, forty-three-year-old man dressed in a white button-down shirt and khaki Dockers, smiled. "They are just as happy as they can be," he said. "They don't have a headache because of some political problem or the concentration of power. They don't watch TV news. They don't care.

"There is another group," he went on. "They are unhappy, because political life has been frozen. They don't like the situation with Russian television or the press. Several months ago, I talked to one important Kremlin person and I asked him why is our TV news so awful and dull. And his answer was 'Why are you watching TV? People like you should go read the Internet if you want information. TV is not for you. It's for the people.'"

In this context, freedom of the press doesn't matter much and, increasingly in Russia, doesn't exist. "Here we have this question of freedom or wealth," Aleksei Venediktov, who runs the radio station Echo of Moscow, told me. It's the one remaining station in the capital that broadcasts truthful, and even combative, news reports and live call-in shows—a genre that has disappeared from Russian television. "People chose wealth. They do not understand that freedom is a necessary condition for preserving that wealth and the security that they have come to value. To be engaged in honest reporting about delicate subjects like corruption or to travel to Chechnya is too dangerous. People don't want it, they don't ask for it, and they really don't understand that they need it."

Anna Politkovskaya seemed to draw energy from the public's indifference. Her pieces could be shrill and polemical, and even those who agreed with her often failed to read them. She didn't care. "She was on a mission for justice," Aleksei Simonov, the longtime leader of the Glasnost Defense Fund, told me when we met for a drink at Moscow's House of Journalists. "Anna was a very peculiar figure in journalism. She was not loved, because she was never part of a team. She was a loner. She could address her best friends in a most rude and dismissive manner if she thought they were wrong about something."

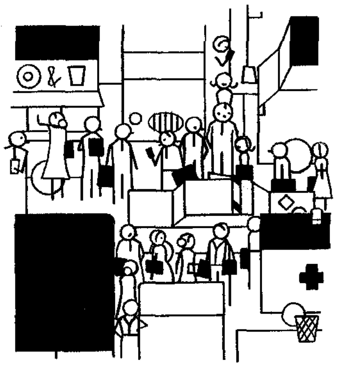
Simonov, a bull of a man with a pointy white beard and the ability to smoke two cigarettes at once, gulped his beer. "Truth to tell," he said, "she was a very difficult woman." He sighed and waved his arms. "Very difficult. But nobody can say she was not honest. She one hundred per cent believed in what she wrote. And she had the facts. She had the facts and the truth, and for that she will always be a hero of Russia."

When it comes to press freedom, Russia is now ranked below countries like Sudan, Zimbabwe, and Afghanistan. It has become nearly impossible to work in places like Chechnya, and Politkovskaya, despite support from her newspaper, was often alone there, unprotected, and out of touch. That made it easy for the Russian Army to abuse her.

"First they ordered me to stand right in the middle of a torn-up field for more than an hour," she wrote in "A Small Corner of Hell," describing how she was tortured in 2001 by the Army. "Hour after hour of interrogation followed. A succession of young officers completely took away my freedom." The officers constantly reminded her that they answered to Putin alone. She went on:

> I was not allowed to make a phone call or walk around, and I was forced to put all my personal belongings on the desk. I choose to omit the nastiest details, since they are completely indecent. . . . From time to time, the zealous young officers were joined by their senior officer, a lieutenant colonel with a swarthy face and dull dark bulging eyes. He would send the youngsters out of the tent, turn on music that he considered romantic and hint at a "favorable outcome" of the affair if I were to comply in certain ways. Between the lieutenant colonel's visits, the young officers tortured me, skillfully hitting my sore spots. They looked through my children's pictures, making a point of saying what they would like to do to the kids. This went on for about three hours. Finally the worldly-wise lieutenant colonel, who would boast now and then that he was giving his life for the Motherland, glanced at his watch and said in a businesslike tone, "Let's go. I'm going to shoot you."

Politkovskaya was eventually released. Afterward, she came to see Chechnya as a metaphor. "This vicious cycle of widespread lies has been maintained by people who call themselves officers," she wrote. "After this lawlessness, they leave for their homes, all over the country. Chechnya as a mode of thinking, feeling, and acting spreads everywhere like gangrenous cells and turns into a nationwide tragedy, infecting all strata of society."



The last time I saw Akhmed Zakayev, he was wearing a camouflage outfit and carried an AK-47. He had a bandolier around his waist and a Motorola walkie-talkie tucked into his web belt. It was August, 1996, days after a few hundred Chechen separatists had surrounded thousands of Russian soldiers, capturing them and the city of Grozny. Zakayev was the vice-premier of the last legally elected Chechen leader, Aslan Maskhadov. Before the war, he had been a Shakespearean actor and the Chechen culture minister. Putin regards Zakayev as a terrorist. In 2002, while attending a conference in Copenhagen, Zakayev was arrested at the request of the Russian government and held in a Danish prison for more than a month. But the Danish courts—saying that they could find no evidence of any crime he had committed—refused to extradite him. When he was released, Politkovskaya came to collect him. "We both would have cried if we were capable of it," she wrote. She accompanied Zakayev to London, where he settled, living across the street from Alexander Litvinenko, to whom he became very close. The courts there, too, refused Russia's request to extradite Zakayev, saying that he ran a high risk of being tortured. Zakayev looks more like a lawyer these days than like a revolutionary; when we met he was wearing a blue suit, a white shirt, and a red tie. His shoes were spit-shined. When Litvinenko died, on November 23rd, Russian prosecutors once again began an effort to extradite him—and also Berezovsky. "Putin won't stop till every one of us is dead," Zakayev told me. By "us" he meant not only the Chechen people but also those who oppose Kremlin policies, people like Politkovskaya and Litvinenko. "Alexander and Anna were killed to send a message," he said. "I am sure of that."

The Russian press belittled the British response to Litvinenko's death. The night after he died, all three major national networks, Rossiya, Channel 1, and NTV, led their news shows with extensive coverage that focussed not on his death but on the British reaction to it.

Rossiya began its broadcast with the words “Panic in London,” and Channel 1 opened with images of British police officers on the streets of central London. “Britain is on the brink of panic,” the correspondent said in a grave voice. On NTV, Gazprom’s channel, one man suggested that “thousands of people around the world might now start panicking.” What had happened to Britain’s legendary stiff upper lip, they wondered—as if it were somehow childish to respond fearfully to an act of nuclear terrorism carried out on one’s own soil.

Polonium 210 is not easy to acquire—at least, not the amount necessary to kill a man. Nearly all of it is produced in Russia. Even though the amount necessary to kill Litvinenko was minuscule, it would almost certainly have required a sophisticated organization to procure, transport, prepare, measure, and administer it. Most people in London, and many in Moscow as well, believe that that organization was the F.S.B. Its members reserve special hatred for those who turn on it, and Litvinenko was a very high-profile traitor. He had accused the Russian President—a member of their secret fraternity—of killing his own citizens to start a war, and he had joined with the forces of Berezovsky. The F.S.B. had the motive, the skills, and the money.

“You know, for the first time in my life I really watched how the mass media in a free country works,” Berezovsky told me when we met in London. “When Litvinenko died, there were a thousand theories: He killed himself, I killed him. Al Qaeda. Jews. Putin. Everybody. But the free press has competition, and step by step it started to get rid of the stupid versions and go to the mainstream: Kremlin. Kremlin. Kremlin. I was impressed. These are people who don’t even understand about Russia, and yet, step by step, they got there. And in Russia it’s the opposite. The press presents an artificial story, and if you open a Russian newspaper you just have to laugh.”

Initially, Berezovsky did not believe that the F.S.B. was involved in the murder—it was too obvious and sensational, certain to bring Russia and Putin unwanted publicity. Then he learned that the job had been botched. “I think that the people who were planning to eliminate Sasha were sure that nobody would be able to trace anything,” he said. “They screwed up. They underestimated the British doctors, and they also overestimated their own talents, which is common. Nobody expected so many traces left. It was clearly a sloppy job. So what happened is that they outsmarted themselves. The polonium was discovered three hours before Sasha died. Three hours. If he had died in the first week or the second week, nobody would ever have known a thing.”

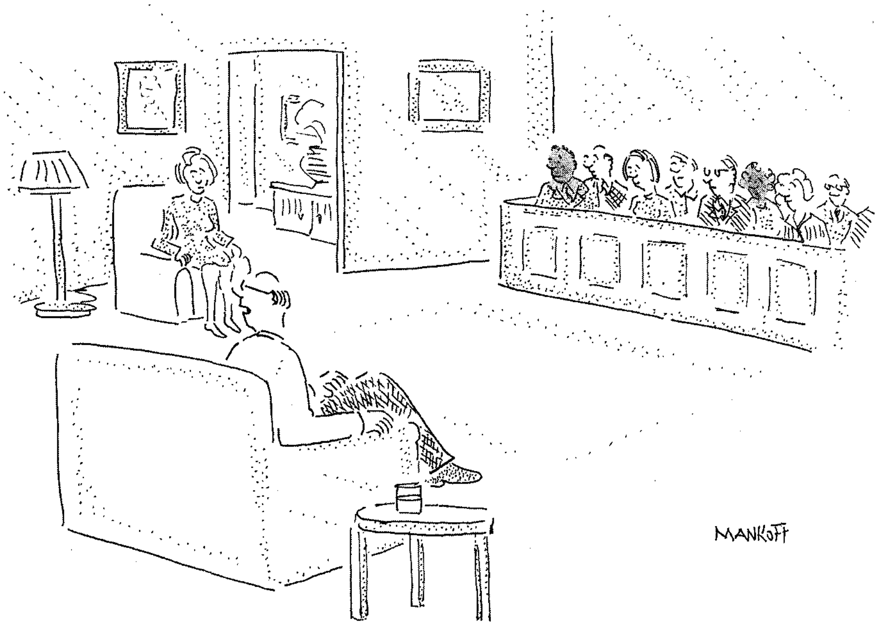
POKER MOMS
NICE BLUFF, SWEETIE.
I HEARD HARVARD JUST STARTED A BLACKJACK SCHOLARSHIP.
WHO'S READY FOR A WHISKEY?
DOUBLE DOWN, DEBBIE!

Alexei Volin, the former Kremlin official, thinks that Berezovsky’s conjecture stems more from a hatred of Vladimir Putin than from evidence or reality. “I don’t believe it was the Russian state that killed Litvinenko with polonium,” he told me. “He is not one of the people who should be killed first. We have Mr. Kalugin,” he said, referring to Oleg Kalugin, the former chief of K.G.B. foreign counterintelligence, who became a harsh critic of the agency and now lives outside Washington. “We have a lot of high-ranking Russian spies living abroad. We have Mr. Berezovsky, Mr. Zakayev. They are more interesting people to kill to demonstrate the power of the state. Also, if somebody from the secret forces wants to kill a person he wouldn’t kill him in a way that is evident to the entire world that this is from Russia. Polonium is produced in Sarov. One city in this whole country. Say, for example, I am the head of the F.S.B. You come to me and you need to kill Mr. Litvinenko. There are a lot of Arab and Martinique and Jamaica guys who are drinking alcohol and using drugs in London and who can kill Mr. Litvinenko by knife. It doesn’t cost a lot of money. It’s not hard. Bringing these containers of polonium from Europe, from one city to another, bringing them on British Airways and Aeroflot flights—that is absolute madness. Why would you bother?”

A couple of days before leaving Moscow, I went to see Viktor Shenderovich at what was once an NTV building; it still houses Vladimir Gusinsky’s cable channels. The place looks like a Courtyard Marriott—a central atrium with big trees, a glass roof, and lots of chrome. It is one of the last refuges for liberal journalists in Moscow. Shenderovich is a grumpy-looking former standup comedian whose satirical television show "Kukly" ("Puppets") aired on NTV between 1994 and 2003. For much of that time, it was required viewing for anyone who cared about politics—a weirdly effective combination of "Saturday Night Live" and "60 Minutes." Shenderovich was savagely funny, using his puppets to ridicule whoever held power. Nobody was spared, not Boris Yeltsin or Mikhail Gorbachev, and certainly not Vladimir Putin. But Putin does not take well to being made fun of. A few weeks after he was portrayed by a puppet as a nasty dwarf, Shenderovich was out of a job. He now has a weekly radio broadcast on Echo of Moscow and another on Radio Liberty.

Shenderovich had just received a phone call from his daughter, who had heard something about Garry Kasparov, the chess champion. Kasparov has emerged as the most prominent man in what is called the Other Russia—a coalition of Putin's most outspoken critics. "The office is being raided as we speak," Shenderovich said. "The police are there locking down computers and confiscating everybody's cell phone." They took away newspapers, books, and other literature to see if any of it was "extremist" and therefore illegal.

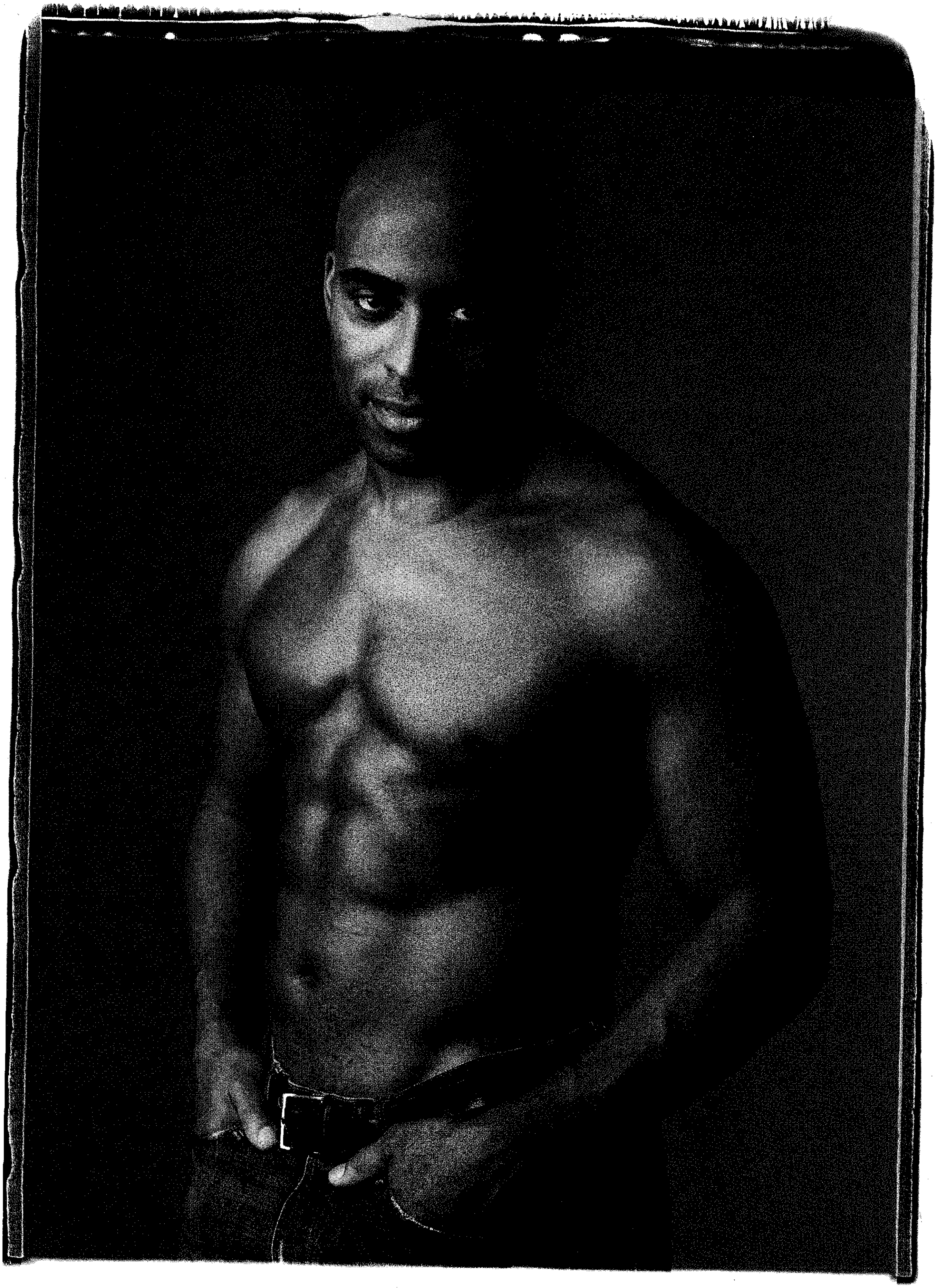
The raid occurred a few days before the Other Russia planned to hold a Saturday-afternoon march from Triumphalnaya Square to the Kremlin; permission was denied, so more than a thousand people gathered across from the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall, beneath an enormous billboard featuring a picture of Gisele Bündchen. There were nearly ten thousand police officers—in green, blue, and brown uniforms, denoting different services—and two helicopters hovered above. To enter the square it was necessary to walk through one of the many metal detectors that the police had provided—and one might well have walked through a time machine. The protest was a bizarre ideological stew; Kasparov spoke about liberty and openness, but Communists spoke about liberty and openness as well. Ancient Stalinists stood on the curb selling anti-Semitic literature, Order of Lenin badges, and yellowing copies of *Zavtra!*, one of Russia's most rabidly right-wing newspapers. There were chess players, too. Speakers talked of "saving Russia from the horrors that had descended upon it." People chanted for a while, and then everyone went home.



"I know it's not perfect, but, by and large, I think the jury system has served this marriage very well."

The next afternoon, Sunday, brought glorious weather, and thousands of people took advantage of it to do some shopping. Many of them ended up in Red Square. Workmen had placed a giant skating rink between Lenin's Tomb and Christian Dior's new flagship store at GUM. Hundreds of young parents stood in line holding their children's hands as they waited to skate. They seemed happy. The gray, thousand-yard stare so representative of Soviet life was gone, replaced with, of all things, a smile. It was not difficult to see why so many Russians—more than seventy per cent, in most polls—seem to support the President. Since Alexander Litvinenko's death, there has been much public discussion of what Putin will do next year, when his term concludes. He has promised to step down, but he has also said that he intends to "retain influence," and people have speculated on the many ways he could do that: as Prime Minister, for example, or as chairman of Gazprom. Nobody knows, perhaps not even Putin. Russia today, and not for the first time, has wagered its well-being on the price of oil, and, as long as salaries continue to rise, people seem untroubled by the future and unwilling to dwell on even the most compelling warnings from the past. Oil prices have crashed before. In recent months, they have fallen more than twenty per cent. At some point, if the fall continues, it may no longer be possible to ignore Russia's dead Cassandra.

"I have wondered a great deal about why I am so intolerant of Putin," Politkovskaya wrote. "Quite simply, I am a forty-five-year-old Muscovite who observed the Soviet Union at its most disgraceful in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. . . . Putin has, by chance, gotten his hands on enormous power and has used it to catastrophic effect. I dislike him because he does not like people. He despises us. He sees us as a means to his ends, a means for the achievement and retention of personal power, no more than that. Accordingly, he believes he can do anything he likes with us, play with us as he sees fit, destroy us as he sees fit. We are nobody, while he whom chance has enabled to clamber to the top of the pile is today Tsar and God. In Russia we have had leaders with this outlook before. It led to tragedy, to bloodshed on a vast scale, to civil wars." For her part, she said, "I want no more of that." ♦



"I don't want to be pigeonholed in sports," Barber says. "That's not who I am." Photograph by Mary Ellen Mark.

THE SPORTING SCENE

WALKING AWAY

Tiki Barber, after the game.

BY BEN McGRATH

On a Tuesday afternoon a few weeks ago, the New York Giants running back Tiki Barber shuffled to the door of his apartment, on East Sixty-ninth Street, and apologized for the mess inside. His two-year-old son, Chason, had a play-date, and Legos, wooden horses, and used tissues were all over the floor. Tuesday is a professional football player's day off, and Barber had just woken up from a nap. He was wearing a hooded gray sweatshirt, gray sweatpants, and thick wool socks, and walked without seeming to lift his feet. He rubbed the top of his head a lot, like someone who'd just bumped into a street sign.

Pain tolerance is an essential requirement of his profession. "You get hit in ways that you can't even make up," he said. "It doesn't look bad. It just looks routine. But you'll get up and you'll say, 'God, I feel like my ribs are broken.' And that's how it was for me this week against Dallas." The Giants had just lost their fourth game in a row, to the Cowboys, and stood at 6–6, with their playoff chances in jeopardy. "We're in the red zone and I take a shot in my side: 'Ughh—that's going to kill me tomorrow.' And I knew it. I woke up yesterday morning and I couldn't even sit up." He was not exactly sitting up now. He had shut himself off in the den, to block out the noise made by Chason and his friend, who were attacking toy guitars. He was stretched out on a brown sofa, with one hand behind his head and the other arm folded across his midsection. He is, among his peers, small: about five feet nine and two hundred and five pounds. He has a shaved head, thick eyebrows, a boxer's jaw, not much of a neck, and a soft, nasal voice that makes him sound as though he had a perpetual cold, which enhanced, that day, the over-all effect of a kid staying home sick from school. "It's like someone's hitting you with a baseball bat," he continued. "That's really what it is, with the helmets and the pads. The way that our equipment has improved over the years, guys are getting less and less scared of contact." He paused, unhappy with the analogy. "It's hard to describe, because there's nothing else like it. Um, I'm trying to think. I'm sure there are things—like, if you fall off a ladder, that's probably what it would feel like. Or get in a car accident."

Barber is thirty-one, and several weeks earlier he had revealed that he planned to retire at the end of the season, his tenth. He was already, by a large measure, the most accomplished offensive player in the history of the Giants. He was also, at the moment, second in his conference in rushing, and had amassed more total yards in the preceding three seasons than any player in the league. He was quitting at the top of his game. When the news broke, David Letterman invited Barber on his show, and, speaking on behalf of puzzled Giants fans—football fans—everywhere, he said, "Before we get to this supposed retirement . . . are you really going to retire?"

Barber felt that he'd been fortunate to last as long as he had without suffering any injuries that would be considered major by football standards. (A fractured ulna in his left arm, late in the 2000 season, did not prevent him from playing in the playoffs.) An N.F.L. career usually lasts about three or four years. Running backs, who take more hard hits than players at any other position—as many as two dozen a game, and often from multiple bodies, and multiple angles, simultaneously—typically fare less well. On average, their bodies give out, or they're unceremoniously cut, after just two and a half years.

"You see this big-ass scar?" Barber said, pulling the leg of his sweats up and exposing a six-inch seam across his left kneecap. "I got that from riding my bike when I was twelve. And it's funny, because at the N.F.L. Combine they go over us with a fine-tooth comb, like they're inspecting a precious piece of equipment. They would see this scar and they would think I had surgery."

He almost had surgery once, during his rookie season, when he tore the posterior cruciate ligament, or P.C.L., in his right knee. ("That didn't hurt—it just felt weird.") One of the team doctors recommended an operation, but Barber consulted a number of veterans, and many of them advised against it: surgery, they said, only begets more surgeries; better not to start so soon. (Jim Otto, a center with the Oakland Raiders in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, has had forty-eight knee operations.) Barber built up the surrounding muscles to compensate for the damaged ligament, but he still can't lock his right knee, and standing up straight wears him out. His natural stance involves crossing his right leg in front of his left, and placing his hands on his hips for balance, like a catalogue model. Barry Word, a former Kansas City Chiefs running back, recently sent Barber an e-mail saying, "It gets worse." Word, who is forty-two, played only six seasons and retired in 1994. "My knees, my feet, my shoulders, my wrists—I ache," he told me. "Sometimes I have a difficult time walking." Like nearly forty per cent of all retired football players, he has degenerative arthritis.

"The short-term zeal and passion that comes from being an athlete, it's immeasurable," Barber said, with only half-hearted conviction. "Sure, you're mortgaging your future health to do it, but I think most guys will tell you it was worth it. And I'm not talking monetarily—because for a lot of those old guys it certainly wasn't worth it monetarily—but I think just the chance to be a hero. Football is America's game. Everybody says baseball is. But, nah, football is. Football defines a day of the week for six months of the year."

And yet Barber was no longer—had never really been—a true believer in the church of football. He saw it as a job, not a way of life, and he was ready for a new, lower-paying one: a career in television, not merely as a sportscaster, like so many former jocks, but as a news personality. That morning, in fact, he'd been up before four, in order to appear, as part of his apprenticeship, on the Fox News show "Fox & Friends," whose topics can range from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and handgun licensing to Donald Trump's feuds.

One of his coaches had recently given him a copy of "Out of Bounds," the autobiography of Jim Brown, another running back who walked away—in Brown's case, at thirty—to pursue a life onscreen, but Barber was more interested in talking about history: Vlad Dracula, Vietnam. "You see that one up there?" He pointed toward volume on the bookshelf to his right: "The Secrets of Inchon," about the Korean War. "I started reading it because I was thinking about Ginny's dad."

Ginny is Barber's wife. Her father, Won Cha, was an officer in the North Korean military, and her mother, Nga, is Vietnamese. They escaped Vietnam twelve days before the fall of Saigon, and now live with the Barbers in Manhattan. Nga was in the other room, supervising Chason and his friend; Ginny had gone to the 92nd Street Y to pick up A.J., the Barbers' other son, who is four.

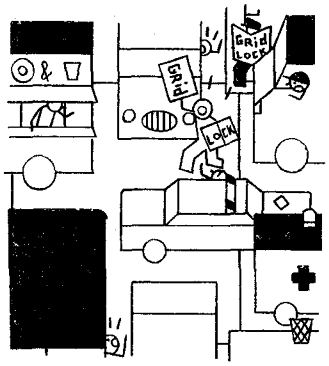
On the floor in front of Barber was a red metal contraption resembling an oversized tackle box, with dials, and with the words "Game Ready" printed on its side. He explained that it was a cold-compression pump system, for treating muscle bruises and joint strains. As he described his weekly rehab schedule—acupuncture on Monday, massage on Tuesday, chiropractic on Wednesday and Thursday, massage again on Friday—it emerged that much less of his time was spent playing or practicing football than dealing with its aftereffects, and preparing his body to be hit again. "I get worked on almost every day," he said. "And I have to, because I'm old."

At one point, while shifting positions, he grimaced and reached behind his back. "I have this huge scar on my hip that's just starting to heal," he said. "It's under my pants. I take my pants off after this game and I have this laceration on my hip, and I'm, like, how the fuck did that happen, you know? But that's just football. It's aesthetically detrimental."

The apartment had suddenly gone quiet; the playdate was over, and now it was Chason's turn to nap. Barber lifted himself up from the couch and conducted a brief tour of the apartment, which in many ways resembled any other multimillionaire athlete's home. There was a big trophy case near the entrance, and a flat-screen TV in every room except the kids' bedroom, which had been painted to look like the interior of Giants Stadium, with lockers and a "Let's Go Tiki" banner. In the master bedroom was a preschooler's drum set—"a lapse in judgment on my wife's part," he said. The walk-in closet (Tiki's is bigger than Ginny's) offered a glimpse of his future, with a rack of thirty-six suits and "too many shoes for any man to have," as he put it. And, last, there was the guest bedroom, which had become the permanent residence of the in-laws. He peeked his head in: Won was sitting in a reclining chair eating grapes and watching Korean television. The thermostat was set to eighty. "Geez, Dad," Barber said.

Barber was hoping to doze off again soon—"My body just does whatever it needs to do"—but in a few hours he'd have to catch a cab to midtown, where, as further preparation for his life after football, he'd been taping a weekly radio show on Sirius with his brother Ronde, a cornerback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. They called it "The Barber Shop."

The Barber brothers are identical twins, although Tiki is a trace shorter and, owing to the demands of his position, about twenty pounds heavier. Their father, J.B., who left the family when the boys were three, was an All-American running back at Virginia Tech. "This was back in the seventies, and everybody was wild and crazy," Geraldine, their mother, says. "We had a friend who was from Africa, and he told us the child's name should have significance." Ronde is short for Jamael Orondé, which means "firstborn son" in Swahili. Tiki comes from Atiim Kiambu, which means "fiery-tempered king." He was an irritable baby.



The adult Tiki Barber is anything but fiery-tempered. He is disarmingly nice, and speaks almost inaudibly at times. He is also a shrewd businessman, methodical and calculating. He is invariably described (often by himself) as "cerebral." His manager, Mark Lepselter, says he used to joke that Barber has ice water in his veins. The secret to Barber's success on the football field is patience and timing, of the sort that come with extreme self-confidence. Watch a recent highlight video: although he changes directions abruptly, he is not explosive. He mainly leaves the impression that the defense has been sedated. When he's tackled with notable vigor, he pats his adversary and congratulates him. Recently, he said, "I don't run fast anymore when I'm on the football field." He did not mean the comment to be self-deprecating.

To account for his and his brother's diverging interests, Barber suggests the nature-versus-nurture debate. He and Ronde lived, for the first twenty years of their lives, in the same room—first at home, in Roanoke, Virginia, where Geraldine worked two jobs to support them, and later at the University of Virginia, where they both had full scholarships to the McIntire School of Commerce. They were inseparable and indistinguishable. Then Tiki was drafted by New York, and Ronde by Tampa. Now, ten years later, Ronde has five tattoos, drinks Crown Royal, and aspires to join the senior P.G.A. Tour, while Tiki reads the Drudge Report, refers to haute chefs by their first names, and has acted in a couple of Off Broadway plays. "Ronde's a better athlete," Tiki says. "I'm just more popular."

But geographical separation is not an altogether convincing explanation. Of the fifty-three players on the Giants' active roster at season's end, only two were Manhattan residents; the rest live in New Jersey, a number of them in gated McMansion developments not unlike Ronde's. A more plausible explanation may be that Tiki came under the influence of Ginny, whom he met in college. Until recently, when she decided to take care of the kids full time, Ginny worked as a publicist for the fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna, on Fifth Avenue.

On "The Barber Shop," Ronde would sometimes queue up tracks from iTunes to play as a lead-in after commercial breaks. During one show several weeks ago, he played a few bars of the song "Smack That," by the hip-hop artists Akon and Eminem. "It's getting played out right now," he said, "but it is a good song."

Tiki: I've never even heard it.

Ronde: Yes you have.

Tiki: I haven't.

Ronde: Come on, Tiki.

Tiki: Dude, I don't listen to the rest of the radio anymore.

Ronde: What station do you listen to?

Tiki: Honestly? Do you want to know? BBC World News.

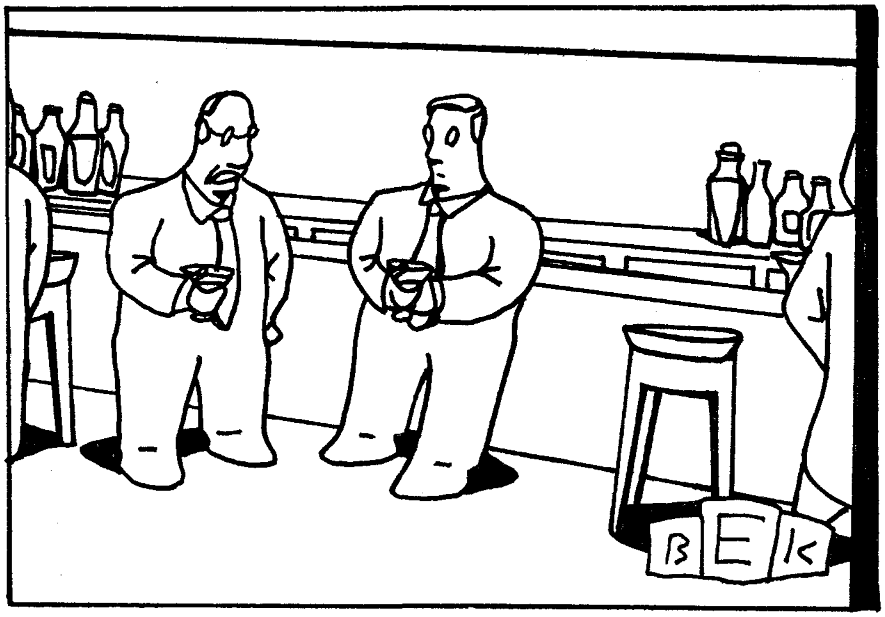
Ronde: Come on, dude.

Tiki: I'm serious.

Ronde: What the *heck* is on the BBC World News?

Tiki: I like to be informed. The British news is different. It gives you a different perspective on the world . . . and they have these really weird accents.

Ronde now calls him Sir Barber.



"I liked him a lot better before I knew him."

Barber's torn P.C.L. is in a couple of senses responsible for his great success. By the time he finished rehabbing his knee, late in his rookie season (he missed four games), he'd lost his starting job, and his confidence, and for the next couple of years he was used as more of a specialist, in third-down situations and on punt and kick returns. Only a change in coaching and personnel afforded him the chance to play a starring role on the field, but in the interim he'd been spared plenty of pounding. In his first three seasons, he carried the ball two hundred and fifty times. In 2005 alone, he took three hundred and fifty-seven handoffs, each promising temporary, if not long-lasting, disfigurement.

Those early years as a peripheral player encouraged him to start thinking about what else he might do with his life. In 1998, during his second season, Barber attended a charity auction where he met Sheri and Stasea Rosenblum, twin sisters who were comics. They exchanged e-mail addresses, and a couple of months later one of them asked if he'd like to audition for a play they were producing, about twins who lived together with one of their boyfriends. He figured, why not? "I wasn't a big-time football player," he says. "I was just trying to make it. I had no idea what my career would be like." He got the part of the boyfriend's lawyer friend. The play was called "Seeing Double," and it opened in February of 1999, at the New Amsterdam Café, and ran for sixteen performances, perfectly mirroring the length of a football season.

Around the same time, he hooked up with Mark Lepselter, a struggling young agent who had heard from one of the Giants' lesser-known players, an offensive lineman named Jerry Reynolds, that Barber was "different." Lepselter and Barber started putting together a plan to capitalize on Barber's extracurricular ambitions, and thus began the franchise that Lepselter now refers to as Tiki Inc. They volunteered Barber's services to the sports radio station WFAN, where he made weekly appearances providing the "insider" perspective, as well as to CBS, where he did local sports news at 5 A.M. They signed up with a corporate speakers' bureau, proposing lectures about overcoming adversity (growing up in a single-parent household, for example). An editor at Simon & Schuster whose son was a big Giants fan approached Lepselter. They came up with an idea for Tiki and Ronde to write inspirational books about their childhood experiences. Three have been published. (The first, "By My Brother's Side," is about Tiki's long-ago bicycle accident.)

"In those years, he was *not* a superstar," Lepselter told me. "Quite frankly, I think a lot of people thought he had a big set of balls—like, 'Who the hell *is* this guy?' "

When he was first drafted, Barber says, he was like a "jitterbug" on the field, lunging and darting at the first hint of open space. Over time, he learned to slow down, and even to collide intentionally with the backs of his own blockers, allowing the play to develop in front of him. He also picked up a handy trick for observing his pursuers when in the open field, without breaking stride: he'd look up at the JumboTron and adjust his running path based on the disembodied real-time image. His football career took off about six years ago, and Tiki Inc. soon followed. "Back in the day, he'd get paid two thousand dollars for an appearance," Lepselter said. "Now we don't leave the house until they're offering forty. I won't even *look* at thirty-five. You're not seeing Tiki at your local Best Buy."

Barber's endorsement income, which he believes he will have to forfeit for the sake of his journalism career, is now only slightly less than that of his football salary: four and a half million dollars a year. If you've watched many football games this winter, you've probably seen him in a commercial for the Cadillac Escalade, dressed in a sweater and driving through the city at night. “One of the great things that I think I’ve been able to do in my life is seize opportunities,” Barber says, in a voice-over. “I wasn’t even a starter. The guy in front of me got hurt and I had a chance and I took that chance and had a big day, and I was a starter ever since. Opportunities are seldom perfect, but I’ve learned that if you’re not ready for them they may not come again.” The fact that it’s a commercial in which Barber does not appear in a Giants uniform was calculated, Lepselter says, to create distance between two brands: football and Tiki Barber. “I don’t want to be pigeonholed in sports,” Barber says. “That’s not who I am.” (Lepselter has dropped his other football clients. “I got out of the N.F.L.-agent business,” he says, and echoes Barber. “That doesn’t define who I am.”)

One opportunity that Barber seized came in March of 2005, when he and his wife and some friends were out at the restaurant Tao. An important-looking man approached Barber’s table and said, “Shimon Peres would like to meet you.” “ ‘Really? Me? All right, *cool*.’ I went over and met him, and he said, ‘My people tell me you’re the best.’ ‘You know, I’m pretty good.’ We had this conversation for about ten minutes. He said, ‘You should come see my country.’ I said, ‘I’d love to!’ He gave me his card.”

Presumably, dozens of people are invited, at least notionally, to visit Israel by the former Prime Minister when he’s travelling abroad. Very few of them call his office a few weeks later and say, “We’re on our way!” In June, the Barbers went to Israel. They stayed at the Dan Hotel, in Tel Aviv, in what they were told was the same room that Bill Clinton had once stayed in. They visited the Knesset, toured Arab Jerusalem, and floated in the Dead Sea. “We were going to go up toward the Golan Heights, but we were a little nervous,” Barber said. “At that time, it was right when Ariel Sharon was promoting disengagement from the Gaza Strip, so you had people with blue-and-white things on their car antennas and then those with orange—pro, and against, disengagement. There was a protest where they threw tar and nails onto a highway and backed up traffic. We were there—we were right in the middle of it.”

Last spring, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice learned that Barber would be attending the White House Correspondents’ Dinner with a journalist friend, she invited him to the State Department for lunch. “Within thirty seconds I feel like I’ve known her forever,” he said, recounting the experience in a gee-whiz style that seems suited for morning television. “She’s welcoming and warm. There’s no façade. I asked her if she wanted to be N.F.L. commissioner. ‘Oh, I’d love to, but I got to figure out Iran first.’ ” He flashed a gleaming white smile. “She’s a phenomenal, phenomenal lady.”

Barber and Lepselter told his potential employers at the major networks about his retirement plans six weeks before they confirmed it to the *Times*, which in turn alerted the Giants’ front office. The team, at that point, was 3–2. The hosts of WFAN’s flagship show, “Mike and the Mad Dog,” snickered about how Barber had come to see himself as Nelson Mandela.

“I’ll come back and buy it someday when there’s a less judgmental sales clerk.”

Before Tiki Barber, there was Frank Gifford, an articulate New York Giants running back with superstar looks, cosmopolitan interests, and aspirations for fame beyond the gridiron. A few years ago, Giants officials arranged for Barber to visit Gifford in his Manhattan office, and the two men talked about everything from fumbling (Barber used to have a problem holding on to the ball) to broadcasting to injuries and, eventually, retirement. “There’s an insecurity to anyone who plays this game,” Gifford explained to me. “You’re portrayed to the world as this invincible character, but underneath there’s insecurity about how long you’re going to last.”

In Gifford’s case, the illusion of invincibility was shattered during a game in 1960, when he was knocked out in spectacular fashion by the Philadelphia Eagles linebacker Chuck Bednarik, a famous hard hitter. Frederick Exley, in “A Fan’s Notes,” described the Bednarik-Gifford encounter:

> I turned to see Bednarik coming from behind Gifford out of his linebacking zone, pounding the turf furiously, like some fierce animal gone berserk. . . . Gifford never saw him, and Bednarik did his job well. Dropping his shoulder ever so slightly, so that it would meet Gifford in the region of the neck and chest, he ran into him without breaking his furious stride, *thwaaahhhp*, taking Gifford’s legs out from under him, sending the ball careening wildly into the air, and bringing him to the soft green turf with a sickening thud. In a way it was beautiful to behold. For what seemed an eternity both Gifford and the ball had seemed to float, weightless, above the field, as if they were performing for the crowd on the trampoline. About five

minutes later, after unsuccessfully trying to revive him, they lifted him onto a stretcher, looking, from where we sat high up in the mezzanine, like a small, broken, blue-and-silver mannikin, and carried him out of the stadium.

Gifford missed the remainder of that season, as the Eagles went on to win the championship, and retired the following summer. He was thirty, and had a nice television job already lined up.

He is now seventy-six, and his days guest-hosting on "Good Morning America" and reporting from the Olympics are over, but he enjoys a kind of emeritus status within the Giants organization. He and his son Cody, a high-school junior, attend all the team's home games and sit in the owners' box. Before kickoff, they like to go down to field level and stand in the tunnel to wait for the rush of players coming out of the locker room, "like a herd of stampeding buffalo," as Gifford says. Barber often stops to slap Cody's hand as he passes.

The week before Christmas, Gifford joined me in an unused broadcasting booth at Giants Stadium to watch the Giants play the Eagles. He was wearing gray slacks, a red sweater, a tan jacket, and his Hall of Fame ring. He now has a hearing aid, and walks with the wide, lumbering gait of many former athletes whose hips have been overworked. The broad flatness of his nose serves as a reminder of the inferiority of football helmets in the days before face masks.

"I probably could have played, but it was kind of a precautionary thing," he said, bringing up the Bednarik incident, and his decision to quit. "They made more of it than it really was, because Bednarik made a career out of it. *Still* does. It was more of a situation where I was off balance when he hit me. And then I kind of semi-fell, snapped my head back, and I had a concussion."

In 1961, as it turned out, Gifford had a hard time leaving football. "The thing I never have forgotten is how I was driving home from doing a TV show—my own TV show, doing local news, both early and late, for WCBS," he said, as, down on the field, the Giants lined up deep in the Eagles' territory. Barber took a handoff and started up the middle, paused, did a stutter step, and veered off to the right, eleven yards, into the end zone: touchdown. "Got it—beautiful," Gifford said. "Wait till you see a replay." He turned toward the small television screen at his side, where the touchdown was soon rerun in slow motion. "That was supposed to go left," he said, pointing at the position of the Giants' blockers at the moment of Barber's hesitation. "He reads 'em so well."

The Giants kicked the extra point, and Gifford resumed reminiscing. "In any event, I was driving home from doing the late news," he said. "I'd been working out every day, because I just generally enjoyed doing it. And I was in good shape, and I had gone up and actually during that season I worked out with the team, practicing against them. I used to have a lot of fun beating 'em. They'd kid me, and all that—call me Broken Head, you know. So I called Wellington Mara"—the owner—"and said I'd like to play another year. I said, 'I think I *can*.' They said O.K., but I'd have to make the team—which I had a tough time doing." He sat on the bench for the first couple of games in 1962, before an injury to a teammate cleared the way for him to start. "I played three more years after that, and loved every minute of it," he said. "And when I did quit I never had one regret after that. When I was *forced* to quit, I had a regret."

The Giants' defense, which had been decimated by injuries, was struggling to contain the Eagles' running back Brian Westbrook. "It's not a healthy game," Gifford said. "I go to reunions at the Hall of Fame, and that's where you see it. Those guys all played twelve to fourteen years. . . . I've had some neck surgery, probably from football—but it wasn't related to the Bednarik incident at all, just wear and tear. And I'm one of the few I know with all my knees."

A teen-ager wearing an Eagles jacket had sneaked into the booth and was sitting quietly behind us, but Gifford failed to notice.

"He'll have a very difficult time in television eclipsing what he's done here," Gifford said, tracking Barber on a receiving route with a pair of binoculars. "Unless he becomes Walter Cronkite, it's not going to happen. He can be successful there, but to transcend what he's done . . . I don't think people will *let* him do it. Sometimes you get trapped in your own greatness."

A Giants employee poked her head in and asked, "Frank, is this gentleman with you?" He turned and, for the first time, noticed the visitor. "He looks like a pretty nice guy," Gifford said, shrugging.

"People like you to be what you are," he went on. He said he'd enjoyed the encore that television provided him, but that, in the end, he'd been allowed to do very little real news coverage. (He added, with evident pride, "I did the first major story on H.I.V. way back there in the early eighties, and it was interesting, because, obviously, it became one of the great stories of the century.") The football stadium was still where he felt most welcome.

The game was now tied. Barber broke through the line and ran fourteen yards up the middle, dragging the Eagles' safety Brian Dawkins with him; another safety, Sean Considine, drilled them both, head first, causing a cracking sound that was audible even beyond the mezzanine level. "Psycho!" Gifford said. He watched the replay and observed that Barber had at least been fortunate enough to see Considine coming, and had clasped the ball with two hands before impact. "I'd have lost it," Gifford said. Two plays later, Barber's backup, Brandon Jacobs, fumbled.

"I was doing a lot of things, like Tiki," Gifford said. "I made a lot of speeches. I'd been to the White House and met Presidents, did a lot of endorsements, was doing commercials. I was the first one I know that did commercials in the N.F.L. Probably in the early days there was a lot of jealousy. I thought, I'm here first as a football player, and if what I'm doing on the outside doesn't affect what I do on the field then the hell with you. I got a feeling Tiki thinks the same way. I put in as much work or more as any of them. I got hit just as hard. And if I want to do something in my free time to enhance my family and well-being, well, then, that's *my* business. We had a head coach the last three years—when I came back, I think he would have much preferred I do nothing. He'd say, 'We got a lot of players on this team who think they're too *good* for this game.' And it offended me."

Down on the field, the Giants were taking unnecessary penalties. ("Holding *again*?") This had been a recurring problem all season long, and Gifford, who still speaks as though he were on the team payroll, seemed to take it personally. Eli Manning, the Giants' inconsistent young quarterback, threw an interception. "This one's ugly," Gifford said. "We lose this, man, there's going to be some *babble*."

At halftime, the Eagles led, 14–10. Another deferential Giants employee appeared: "Do you want any food delivered here, Mr. Gifford?" There was a knock on the window from the adjacent box, and a young woman waved and came over. "I took a picture with you, like, eight years ago, and I wanted to update it," she said. "Can I just hang in here with you?" She mentioned that Jeremy Shockey, the Giants' maniacal tight end, was her favorite player.

"Is he cute?" Gifford asked, his mood lightening.

"Shockey? I'm getting married to him. He doesn't know it yet. We're almost engaged."

"Well, it'll be your secret." He winked.

"Oh, no, you can let the world know, so that all the other women will just stay away."

Soon, the game resumed, and the Eagles began marching down the field again with ease. "They're eating our lunch," Gifford said, shaking his head. "God, we look awful."

The Giants lost that game, and lost again in humiliating fashion—their offense crossed the fifty-yard line only once—the following Sunday. The season, which began with six wins in eight games, was a dismal, injury-plagued failure. Only a heroic individual performance by Barber on New Year's Eve weekend, in Washington, salvaged a .500 record and propelled them, improbably, into the playoffs. In what could have been the final game of his career, he rushed for two hundred and thirty-four yards, a personal record, and scored three touchdowns.

In the locker room afterward, the players seemed as angry as they were relieved. The "babble" that Gifford had predicted had been filling the papers for two weeks, with calls for firing the coach, and accusations of discord among the players. Barber had likened the press coverage of the Giants' locker-room dynamic to the Swift Boat Veterans' campaign: "John Kerry never came out and definitively closed it, and you don't know what's true, but it became an animal in and of itself." His point was that perceived truth has a way of becoming reality.

One of the larger Giants shouted at the media, "Don't come in!" A smaller reporter groaned, and the Giant snapped back, pointing at him, "He just told me to shut up!"

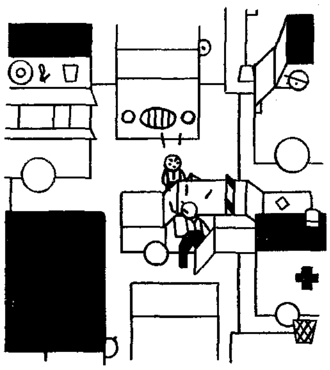
"Look at the *size* of you," the reporter replied, backing away.

"Then y'all going to try to sue me," the player said.

One in four Giants weighs more than three hundred pounds, and nearly half of them are at least six feet four. All but a handful—the kicker, Barber, Eli Manning—are covered in tattoos, and, on game days, hopped up on multiple cans of Red Bull. (Six days' rest is not enough time, despite all the whirlpool baths and massages and cold compression, to get most players back on the field without some kind of medicinal aid.) A few players had gashes on their arms. One offensive lineman, who had a Band-Aid on his butt, strode back from the shower yelling, "Anybody need cutters?"—meaning scissors, for removing the tape that was wound around so many ankles. The journalists cleared out of his way.

"Look at all these haters, surrounding me every day," another Giant sang, while still naked in front of his locker, and doing a little dance. "Now they want to dock my pay. I can feel the hate in the room. I can *feel* it. Hate hate hate."

Barber emerged from the shower quietly. He took his time dressing, first applying cocoa-butter body oil to his legs and torso, and then reaching for his lip balm. He pulled on his underwear, covering a fresh cut on his bottom, along with the old hip laceration, which was now more of a dull purple streak, and began buttoning a striped shirt. A female reporter, feigning impatience while she and everyone else waited for him to finish so that they could proceed with the post-game interview, whispered to Barber, "I wish you didn't dress quite so well." They hugged.



During the telecast of the game, it had been revealed that Barber long ago stopped bringing his playbook home with him. In the interview room, he was asked if he intended to change his habits for the playoffs. "I have two kids at home," he said. "So I leave my work at the stadium."

"Don't you have the rest of your life to go to TV?" another reporter asked.

"You know, it's better to leave 'em wanting more," he said.

He walked away carrying a copy of *Vanity Fair* and the weekend *Wall Street Journal*—work, but of a different sort. ("Roger Ailes gave me a book that's called 'You Are the Message,' " he told me. "And one of the things it says is the audience won't forgive you for certain things. One is being uncomfortable, and another is being unprepared.")

His football career ended a week later, when the Giants were eliminated in a rematch against the Eagles in Philadelphia. Once again, he was the Giants' best player, but he spent the final five minutes sitting on the sideline, in the pouring rain, with cleat marks from Brian Dawkins in his back, helpless to prevent the Eagles from running out the clock and kicking a field goal on the last play.

Barber seriously considered retiring a year ago. "I decided to come back because I looked at our team, looked at our off-season acquisitions, and said, 'You know what? We can win a Super Bowl,' " he told me. "And that was my ultimate goal. The whole off-season, that's all I thought about: I need to win a Super Bowl, I need to define my career by winning a Super Bowl."

Junior Seau, a thirty-eight-year-old linebacker, may have felt the same way last August, when the New England Patriots called and asked if he'd like to play a seventeenth season. Seau had retired only a few days earlier, after the Miami Dolphins cut him. His previous two seasons with the Dolphins had ended prematurely, thanks to a busted Achilles ten-

"At least we're not going to be in trouble with the animal-rights people."

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don and a torn pectoral muscle, but the Patriots are perennial contenders, so he accepted their offer—and on November 26th, shortly after Thanksgiving, he broke his right arm while making a tackle. Last month, he announced that he was hoping to be in uniform, somewhere, again next season.

Seau, not Barber, represents the N.F.L. mainstream, and for this reason the Players Association recently introduced an annual "exit symposium," where retired and retiring players can meet to relay their tips and anxieties to one another. Barber can tell them about the benefits of adjusting one's football expectations downward when injuries to teammates and questionable coaching turn a Super Bowl dream into yet another mediocre season, as he did for me recently when he described a peculiar vision of what makes a football life memorable. "Jay Feely, our kicker, he wants to be a politician," he said. "And all he does is read books, whether it's 'Freakonomics' or whatever. Brandon Short, a linebacker who is from the hood, who has this kind of tough exterior, all he and I do is talk politics," he went on. "He's very liberal, Brandon. And, because I work for Fox, he's always coming at me: 'Tik, we got some issues to talk about.' He goes, 'I got to find out how you stand on certain things.' And it's half funny but he's also dead serious. As someone who's kind of becoming a journalist, I see Brandon as the everyday man, even though he's a football player. He doesn't understand why Bill O'Reilly's going off on this or why Hannity and Colmes are debating that way. He'll say to me, 'Uh, President Bush, he doesn't have a plan on Iraq, he's just in there because he had this vendetta against Saddam Hussein. The entire invasion of Afghanistan was just a front so he could go into Iraq.' Obviously, we both hardly know what we're talking about, but we're having the same discussion Joe and Susie are having on Fiftieth Street, and that's what's cool to me. That's what I'll remember about my football experience, other than the games. Really, although we seem like we're lugheads, we're everybody else."

With the WFAN crowd—the lughead-worshippers—Barber's happy exit doesn't sit so well. The church of football does not tolerate doubters, and Barber, in his final professional appearance at Giants Stadium, said, "I was a business major who played football."

"I have to be fair: my wife thought Tiki would be a very, very successful TV personality," Chris (Mad Dog) Russo said on the air the other day. "*I* won't go out of my way to watch."

"He's going to be doing light stuff," Mike Francesa said, as though "Mike and the Mad Dog" were suddenly "Weekend Edition." "He's not going to be sitting next to Tim Russert. . . . Maybe he will have an appeal to women."

The cleat marks in Barber's back are fading. He has lost nine pounds, and figures to lose about six more. ("There's eating until you're content, and eating until you're full. To do this job well, I always had to eat until I was full.") He seems destined for the "bumps and bruises" club, for guys who walked, rather than limped, off the field, and can make sport of the painful memories. As in "Hell, I was human, I had bumps and bruises." That's what Chuck Bednarik, who is now eighty-one, told me last month, before adding, "I'm just looking at my right hand. The pinky finger is way out a hundred and eighty degrees. My second and third fingers are crooked as hell. My biceps on my right arm is ripped. And of course I had knee surgery. So I can still see and feel some of it, but not too bad."

Barber's contract with Fox is up, and he and Lepselter are currently negotiating with a few networks (ABC is the rumored favorite) for a four-year contract involving what Lepselter hopes will be a seventy-thirty split between news and sports. Barber does not want to end up behind the fake-mahogany desk on Sunday afternoons.

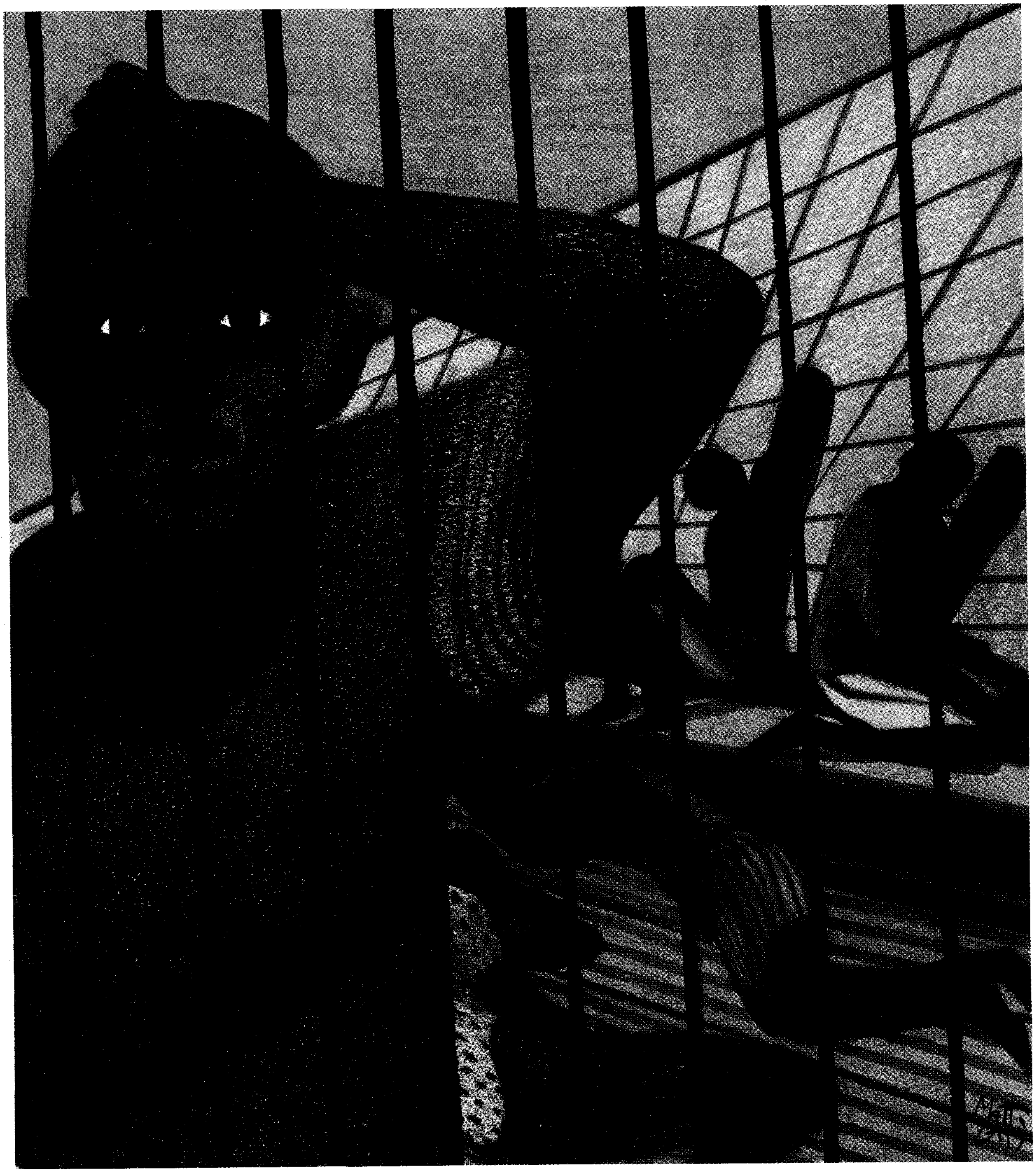
On the final edition of "The Barber Shop," Ronde played Roy Rogers's "Happy Trails." Toward the end of the show, the brothers started taking calls from listeners, a number of whom seemed convinced that Tiki's retirement, like Michael Jordan's, or Roger Clemens's, or Frank Gifford's, was just a passing phase. A caller named Jeff pressed him on this point: "Say you take this year off, and you go into, like, your reporting and your news—whatever you're going to do. And say John Fox came up and coached the Giants. Do you think you'd come back?"

"No," Tiki said. "This morning I woke up and both of my knees were killing me. I took some shots, and I told myself, I'm not going to miss this." ♦

FICTION

CELL ONE

BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE



The first time our house was robbed, it was our neighbor Osita who climbed in through the dining-room window and stole our TV and VCR, and the "Purple Rain" and "Thriller" videotapes that my father had brought back from America. The second time our house was robbed, it was my brother Nnamabia, who faked a break-in and stole my mother's jewelry. It happened on a Sunday. My parents had travelled to their home town to visit our grandparents, so Nnamabia and I went to church alone. He drove my mother's green Peugeot 504. We sat together in church as we usually did, but we did not have time to nudge each other and stifle giggles about somebody's ugly hat or threadbare caftan, because Nnamabia left without a word after ten minutes. He came back just before the priest said, "The Mass is ended, go in peace." I was a little piqued. I imagined that he had gone off to smoke or to see some girl, since he had the car to himself for once; but he could at least have told me. We drove home in silence, and when he parked in our long driveway I stayed back to pick some ixora flowers while Nnamabia unlocked the front door. I went inside to find him standing in the middle of the parlor.

"We've been robbed!" he said.

It took me a moment to take in the room. Even then, I felt that there was a theatrical quality to the way the drawers had been flung open. Or perhaps it was simply that I knew my brother too well. Later, when my parents had come home and neighbors began to troop in to say *ndo*—sorry—and to snap their fingers and heave their shoulders up and down, I sat alone in my room upstairs and realized what the queasiness in my gut was: Nnamabia had done it, I knew. My father knew, too. He pointed out that the window louvres had been slipped out from the inside, rather than from the outside (Nnamabia was usually smarter than that—perhaps he had been in a hurry to get back to church before Mass ended), and that the robber knew exactly where my mother's jewelry was: in the back left corner of her metal trunk. Nnamabia stared at my father with wounded eyes and said that he may have done horrible things in the past, things that had caused my parents pain, but that he had done nothing in this case. He walked out the back door and did not come home that night. Or the next night. Or the night after. Two weeks later, he came home gaunt, smelling of beer, crying, saying he was sorry, that he had pawned the jewelry to the Hausa traders in Enugu, and that all the money was gone.

"How much did they give you for my gold?" our mother asked him. And when he told her she placed both hands on her head and cried, "Oh! Oh! *Chi m egbuo m!* My God has killed me!" I wanted to slap her. My father asked Nnamabia to write a report: how he had pawned the jewelry, what he had spent the money on, with whom he had spent it. I didn't think that Nnamabia would tell the truth, and I don't think that my father thought he would, but he liked reports, my professor father, he liked to have things written down and nicely documented. Besides, Nnamabia was seventeen, with a carefully tended beard. He was already between secondary school and university, and was too old for caning. What else could my father have done? After Nnamabia had written the report, my father filed it in the steel cabinet in his study where he kept our school papers.

"That he could hurt his mother like that!" was the last thing my father said on the subject.

But Nnamabia hadn't set out to hurt her. He had done it because my mother's jewelry was the only thing of any value in the house: a lifetime's accumulation of solid-gold pieces. He had done it, too, because other sons of professors were doing it. This was the season of thefts on our serene campus. Boys who had grown up watching "Sesame Street," reading Enid Blyton, eating cornflakes for breakfast, and attending the university staff primary school in polished brown sandals were now cutting through the mosquito netting of their neighbors' windows, sliding out glass louvres, and climbing in to steal TVs and VCRs. We knew the thieves. Still, when the professors saw one another at the staff club or at church or at a faculty meeting, they were careful to moan about the riffraff from town coming onto their sacred campus to steal.

The thieving boys were the popular ones. They drove their parents' cars in the evening, their seats pushed back and their arms stretched out to reach the steering wheel. Osita, our neighbor who had stolen our TV only weeks before Nnamabia's theft, was lithe and handsome in a brooding sort of way, and walked with the grace of a cat. His shirts were always crisply ironed, and I used to watch him across the hedge, then close my eyes and imagine that he was walking toward me, coming to claim me as his. He never noticed me. When he stole from us, my parents did not go over to Professor Ebube's house to ask for our things back. But they knew it was Osita. Osita was two years older than Nnamabia; most of the thieving boys were a little older than Nnamabia, and maybe that was why Nnamabia had not stolen from another person's house. Perhaps he did not feel old enough, qualified enough, for anything more serious than my mother's jewelry.

Nnamabia looked just like my mother—he had her fair complexion and large eyes, and a generous mouth that curved perfectly. When my mother took us to the market, traders would call out, "Hey! Madam, why did you waste your fair skin on a boy and leave the girl so dark? What is a boy doing with all this beauty?" And my mother would chuckle, as though she took a mischievous and joyful responsibility for Nnamabia's looks. When, at eleven, Nnamabia broke the window of his classroom with a stone, my mother gave him the money to replace it and didn't tell my father. When, a few years later, he took the key to my father's car and pressed it into a bar of soap that my father found before Nnamabia could take it to a locksmith, she made vague sounds about how he was just experimenting and it didn't mean anything. When he stole the exam questions from the study and sold them to my father's students, she yelled at him, but then told my father that Nnamabia was sixteen, after all, and really should be given more pocket money.

I don't know whether Nnamabia felt remorse for stealing her jewelry. I could not always tell from my brother's gracious, smiling face what he really felt. He and I did not talk about it, and neither did my parents. Even though my mother's sisters sent her their gold earrings, even though she bought a new gold chain from Mrs. Mozie—the glamorous woman who imported gold from Italy—and began to drive to Mrs. Mozie's house once a month to pay in installments, we never talked about what had happened to her jewelry. It was as if by pretending that Nnamabia had not done the things he had done we could give him the opportunity to start

LORENZO MATTOTTI

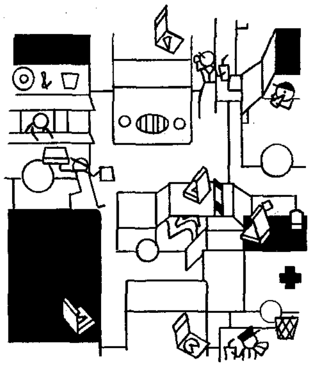
afresh. The robbery might never have been mentioned again if Nnamabia had not been arrested two years later, in his second year of university.

By then, it was the season of cults on the Nsukka campus, when signs all over the university read in bold letters, "SAY NO TO CULTS." The Black Axe, the Buccaneers, and the Pirates were the best known. They had once been benign fraternities, but they had evolved, and now eighteen-year-olds who had mastered the swagger of American rap videos were undergoing secret initiations that sometimes left one or two of them dead on Odim Hill. Guns and tortured loyalties became common. A boy would leer at a girl who turned out to be the girlfriend of the Capone of the Black Axe, and that boy, as he walked to a kiosk later to buy a cigarette, would be stabbed in the thigh. He would turn out to be a Buccaneer, and so one of his fellow-Buccaneers would go to a beer parlor and shoot the nearest Black Axe in the leg, and then the next day another Buccaneer would be shot dead in the refectory, his body falling onto aluminum plates of *garri*, and that evening a Black Axe—a professor's son—would be hacked to death in his room, his CD player splattered with blood. It was inane. It was so abnormal that it quickly became normal. Girls stayed in their rooms after classes, and lecturers quivered, and when a fly buzzed too loudly people jumped. So the police were called in. They sped across campus in their rickety blue Peugeot 505 and glowered at the students, their rusty guns poking out of the car windows. Nnamabia came home from his lectures laughing. He thought that the police would have to do better than that; everyone knew the cult boys had newer guns.

My parents watched Nnamabia with silent concern, and I knew that they, too, were wondering if he was in a cult. Cult boys were popular, and Nnamabia was very popular. Boys yelled out his nickname—"The Funk!"—and shook his hand whenever he passed by, and girls, especially the popular ones, hugged him for too long when they said hello. He went to all the parties, the tame ones on campus and the wilder ones in town, and he was the kind of ladies' man who was also a guy's guy, the kind who smoked a packet of Rothmans a day and was reputed to be able to finish a case of Star beer in a single sitting. But it seemed more his style to befriend all the cult boys and yet not be one himself. And I was not entirely sure, either, that my brother had whatever it took—guts or diffidence—to join a cult.

The only time I asked him if he was in a cult, he looked at me with surprise, as if I should have known better than to ask, before replying, "Of course not." I believed him. My dad believed him, too, when he asked. But our believing him made little difference, because he had already been arrested for belonging to a cult.

This is how it happened. On a humid Monday, four cult members waited at the campus gate and waylaid a professor driving a red Mercedes. They pressed a gun to her head, shoved her out of the car, and drove it to the Faculty of Engineering, where they shot three boys who were coming out of the building. It was noon. I was in a class nearby, and when we heard the shots our lecturer was the first to run out the door. There was loud screaming, and suddenly the stairwells were packed with scrambling students unsure where to run. Outside, the bodies lay on the lawn. The Mercedes had already screeched away. Many students hastily packed their bags, and *okada* drivers charged twice the usual fare to take them to the motor park to get on a bus. The vice-chancellor announced that all evening classes would be cancelled and everyone had to stay indoors after 9 P.M. This did not make much sense to me, since the shooting had happened in sparkling daylight, and perhaps it did not make sense to Nnamabia, either, because the first night of the curfew he didn't come home. I assumed that he had spent the night at a friend's; he did not always come home anyway. But the next morning a security man came to tell my parents that Nnamabia had been arrested at a bar with some cult boys and was at the police station. My mother screamed, "*Ekwuzikwana!* Don't say that!" My father calmly thanked the security man. We drove to the police station in town, and there a constable chewing on the tip of a dirty pen said, "You mean those cult boys arrested last night? They have been taken to Enugu. Very serious case! We must stop this cult business once and for all!"



We got back into the car, and a new fear gripped us all. Nsukka, which was made up of our slow, insular campus and the slower, more insular town, was manageable; my father knew the police superintendent. But Enugu was anonymous. There the police could do what they were famous for doing when under pressure to produce results: kill people.

The Enugu police station was in a sprawling, sandy compound. My mother bribed the policemen at the desk with money, and with jollof rice and meat, and they allowed Nnamabia to come out of his cell and sit on a bench under a mango tree with us. Nobody asked why he had stayed out the night before. Nobody said that the police were wrong to walk into a bar and arrest all the boys drinking there, including the barman. Instead, we listened to Nnamabia talk.

"If we ran Nigeria like this cell," he said, "we would have no problems. Things are so organized. Our cell has a chief and he has a second-in-command, and when you come in you are expected to give them some money. If you don't, you're in trouble."

"And did you have any money?" my mother asked.

Nnamabia smiled, his face more beautiful than ever, despite the new pimple-like insect bite on his forehead, and said that he had slipped his money into his anus shortly after the arrest. He knew the policemen would take it if he didn't hide it, and he knew that he would need it to buy his peace in the cell. My parents said nothing for a while. I imagined Nnamabia rolling hundred-naira notes into a thin cigarette shape and then reaching into the back of his trousers to slip them into himself. Later, as we drove back to Nsukka, my father said, "This is what I should have done when he stole your jewelry. I should have had him locked up in a cell."

My mother stared out the window.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because this has shaken him. Couldn't you see?" my father asked with a smile. I couldn't see it. Nnamabia had seemed fine to me, slipping his money into his anus and all.

Elite Events
Wedding Planning

"Well, in the wedding of my boyhood dreams there was an open bar."

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Nnamabia's first shock was seeing a Buccaneer sobbing. The boy was tall and tough, rumored to have carried out one of the killings and likely to become Capone next semester, and yet there he was in the cell, cowering and sobbing after the chief gave him a light slap on the back of the head. Nnamabia told me this in a voice lined with both disgust and disappointment; it was as if he had suddenly been made to see that the Incredible Hulk was really just painted green. His second shock was learning about the cell farthest away from his, Cell One. He had never seen it, but every day two policemen carried a dead man out of Cell One, stopping by Nnamabia's cell to make sure that the corpse was seen by all.

Those in the cell who could afford to buy old plastic paint cans of water bathed every other morning. When they were let out into the yard, the policemen watched them and often shouted, "Stop that or you are going to Cell One now!" Nnamabia could not imagine a place worse than his cell, which was so crowded that he often stood pressed against the wall. The wall had cracks where tiny *kwalikwata* lived; their bites were fierce and sharp, and when he yelped his cellmates mocked him. The biting was worse during the night, when they all slept on their sides, head to foot, to make room for one another, except the chief, who slept with his whole back lavishly on the floor. It was also the chief who divided up the two plates of rice that were pushed into the cell every day. Each person got two mouthfuls.

Nnamabia told us this during the first week. As he spoke, I wondered if the bugs in the wall had bitten his face or if the bumps spreading across his forehead were due to an infection. Some of them were tipped with cream-colored pus. Once in a while, he scratched at them. I wanted him to stop talking. He seemed to enjoy his new role as the sufferer of indignities, and he did not understand how lucky he was that the policemen allowed him to come out and eat our food, or how stupid he'd been to stay out drinking that night, and how uncertain his chances were of being released.

We visited him every day for the first week. We took my father's old Volvo, because my mother's Peugeot was unsafe for trips outside Nsukka. By the end of the week, I noticed that my parents were acting differently—subtly so, but differently. My father no longer gave a monologue, as soon as we were waved through the police checkpoints, on how illiterate and corrupt the police were. He did not bring up the day when they had delayed us for an hour because he'd refused to bribe them, or how they had stopped a bus in which my beautiful cousin Ogechi was travelling and singled her out and called her a whore because she had two cell phones, and asked her for so much money that she had knelt on the ground in the rain begging them to let her go. My mother did not mumble that the policemen were symptoms of a larger malaise. Instead, my parents remained silent. It was as if by refusing to criticize the police they would somehow make Nnamabia's freedom more likely. "Delicate" was the word the superintendent at Nsukka had used. To get Nnamabia out anytime soon would be delicate, especially with the police commissioner in Enugu giving gloating, preening interviews about the arrest of the cultists. The cult problem was serious. Big Men in Abuja were following events. Everybody wanted to seem as if he were doing something.

The second week, I told my parents that we were not going to visit Nnamabia. We did not know how long this would last, and petrol was too expensive for us to drive three hours every day. Besides, it would not hurt Nnamabia to fend for himself for one day.

My mother said that nobody was begging me to come—I could sit there and do nothing while my innocent brother suffered. She started walking toward the car, and I ran after her. When I got outside, I was not sure what to do, so I picked up a stone near the ixora bush and hurled it at the windshield of the Volvo. I heard the brittle sound and saw the tiny lines spreading like rays on the glass before I turned and dashed upstairs and locked myself in my room. I heard my mother shouting. I heard my father's voice. Finally, there was silence. Nobody went to see Nnamabia that day. It surprised me, this little victory.

We visited him the next day. We said nothing about the windshield, although the cracks had spread out like ripples on a frozen stream. The policeman at the desk, the pleasant dark-skinned one, asked why we had not come the day before—he had missed my mother's jollof rice. I expected Nnamabia to ask, too, even to be upset, but he looked oddly sober. He did not eat all of his rice.

"What is wrong?" my mother said, and Nnamabia began to speak almost immediately, as if he had been waiting to be asked. An old man had been pushed into his cell the day before—a man perhaps in his mid-seventies, white-haired, skin finely wrinkled, with an old-fashioned dignity about him. His son was wanted for armed robbery, and when the police had not been able to find his son they had decided to lock up the father.

"The man did nothing," Nnamabia said.

"But you did nothing, either," my mother said.

Nnamabia shook his head as if our mother did not understand. The following days, he was more subdued. He spoke less, and mostly about the old man: how he could not afford bathing water, how the others made fun of him or accused him of hiding his son, how the chief ignored him, how he looked frightened and so terribly small.

"Does he know where his son is?" my mother asked.

"He has not seen his son in four months," Nnamabia said.

"Of course it is wrong," my mother said. "But this is what the police do all the time. If they do not find the person they are looking for, they lock up his relative."

"The man is ill," Nnamabia said. "His hands shake, even when he's asleep."

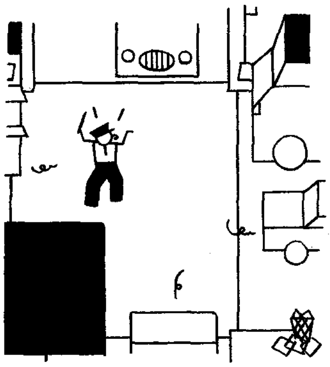
He closed the container of rice and turned to my father. "I want to give him some of this, but if I bring it into the cell the chief will take it."

My father went over and asked the policeman at the desk if we could be allowed to see the old man in Nnamabia's cell for a few minutes. The policeman was the light-skinned acerbic one who never said thank you when my mother handed over the rice-and-money bribe, and now he sneered in my father's face and said that he could well lose his job for letting even Nnamabia out and yet now we were asking for another person? Did we think this was visiting day at a boarding school? My father came back and sat down with a sigh, and Nnamabia silently scratched at his bumpy face.

The next day, Nnamabia barely touched his rice. He said that the policemen had splashed soapy water on the floor and walls of the cell, as they usually did, and that the old man, who had not bathed in a week, had yanked his shirt off and rubbed his frail back against the wet floor. The policemen started to laugh when they saw him do this, and then they asked him to take all his clothes off and parade in the corridor outside the cell; as he did, they laughed louder and asked whether his son the thief knew that Papa's buttocks were so shrivelled. Nnamabia was staring at his yellow-orange rice as he spoke, and when he looked up his eyes were filled with tears, my worldly brother, and I felt a tenderness for him that I would not have been able to describe if I had been asked to.

There was another attack on campus—a boy hacked another boy with an axe—two days later.

"This is good," my mother said. "Now they cannot say that they have arrested all the cult boys." We did not go to Enugu that day; instead my parents went to see the local police superintendent, and they came back with good news. Nnamabia and the barman were to be released immediately. One of the cult boys, under questioning, had insisted that Nnamabia was not a member. The next day, we left earlier than usual, without jollof rice. My mother was always nervous when we drove, saying to my father, "*Nekwa ya!* Watch out!," as if he could not see the cars making dangerous turns in the other lane, but this time she did it so often that my father pulled over before we got to Ninth Mile and snapped, "Just who is driving this car?"



Two policemen were flogging a man with *koboko* as we drove into the police station. At first, I thought it was Nnamabia, and then I thought it was the old man from his cell. It was neither. I knew the boy on the ground, who was writhing and shouting with each lash. He was called Aboy and had the grave ugly face of a hound; he drove a Lexus around campus and was said to be a Buccaneer. I tried not to look at him as we walked inside. The policeman on duty, the one with tribal marks on his cheeks who always said "God bless you" when he took his bribe, looked away when he saw us, and I knew that something was wrong. My parents gave him the note from the superintendent. The policeman did not even glance at it. He knew about the release order, he told my father; the barman had already been released, but there was a complication with the boy. My mother began to shout, "What do you mean? Where is my son?"

The policeman got up. "I will call my senior to explain to you."

My mother rushed at him and pulled on his shirt. "Where is my son? Where is my son?" My father pried her away, and the policeman brushed at his chest, as if she had left some dirt there, before he turned to walk away.

"Where is our son?" my father asked in a voice so quiet, so steely, that the policeman stopped.

"They took him away, sir," he said.

"They took him away? What are you saying?" my mother was yelling. "Have you killed my son? Have you killed my son?"

"Where is our son?" my father asked again.

"My senior said I should call him when you came," the policeman said, and this time he hurried through a door.

It was after he left that I felt suddenly chilled by fear; I wanted to run after him and, like my mother, pull at his shirt until he produced Nnamabia. The senior policeman came out, and I searched his blank face for clues.

"Good day, sir," he said to my father.

"Where is our son?" my father asked. My mother breathed noisily.

"No problem, sir. It is just that we transferred him. I will take you there right away." There was something nervous about the policeman; his face remained blank, but he did not meet my father's eyes.

"Transferred him?"

"We got the order this morning. I would have sent somebody for him, but we don't have petrol, so I was waiting for you to come so that we could go together."

"Why was he transferred?"

"I was not here, sir. They said that he misbehaved yesterday and they took him to Cell One, and then yesterday evening there was a transfer of all the people in Cell One to another site."

"He misbehaved? What do you mean?"

"I was not here, sir."

My mother spoke in a broken voice: "Take me to my son! Take me to my son right now!"

I sat in the back with the policeman, who smelled of the kind of old camphor that seemed to last forever in my mother's trunk. No one spoke except for the policeman when he gave my father directions. We arrived about fifteen minutes later, my father driving inordinately fast. The small, walled compound looked neglected, with patches of overgrown grass strewn with old bottles and plastic bags. The policeman hardly waited for my father to stop the car before he opened the door and hurried out, and again I felt chilled. We were in a godforsaken part of town, and there was no sign that said "Police Station." There was a strange deserted feeling in the air. But the policeman soon emerged with Nnamabia. There he was, my handsome brother, walking toward us, seemingly unchanged, until he came close enough for my mother to hug him, and I saw him wince and back away—his arm was covered in soft-looking welts. There was dried blood around his nose.

"Why did they beat you like this?" my mother asked him. She turned to the policeman. "Why did you people do this to my son? Why?"

The man shrugged. There was a new insolence to his demeanor; it was as if he had been uncertain about Nnamabia's well-being but now, reassured, could let himself talk. "You cannot raise your children properly—all of you people who feel important because you work at the university—and when your children misbehave you think they should not be punished. You are lucky they released him."

My father said, "Let's go."

He opened the door and Nnamabia climbed in, and we drove home. My father did not stop at any of the police checkpoints on the road, and, once, a policeman gestured threateningly with his gun as we sped past. The only time my mother opened her mouth on the drive home was to ask Nnamabia if he wanted us to stop and buy some *okpa*. Nnamabia said no. We had arrived in Nsukka before he finally spoke.

"Yesterday, the policemen asked the old man if he wanted a free half bucket of water. He said yes. So they told him to take his clothes off and parade the corridor. Most of my cellmates were laughing. Some of them said it was wrong to treat an old man like that." Nnamabia paused. "I shouted at the policeman. I told him the old man was innocent and ill, and if they kept him here it wouldn't help them find his son, because the man did not even know where his son was. They said that I should shut up immediately, that they would take me to Cell One. I didn't care. I didn't shut up. So they pulled me out and slapped me and took me to Cell One."

Nnamabia stopped there, and we asked him nothing else. Instead, I imagined him calling the policeman a stupid idiot, a spineless coward, a sadist, a bastard, and I imagined the shock of the policemen—the chief staring openmouthed, the other cellmates stunned at the audacity of the boy from the university. And I imagined the old man himself looking on with surprised pride and quietly refusing to undress. Nnamabia did not say what had happened to him in Cell One, or what happened at the new site. It would have been so easy for him, my charming brother, to make a sleek drama of his story, but he did not. ♦

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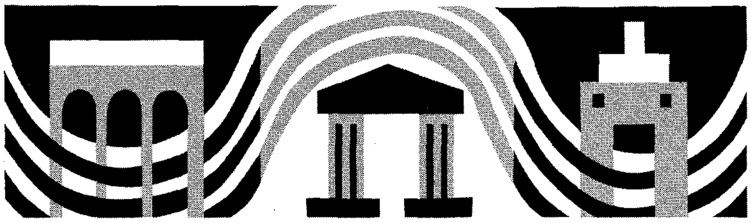


BOOKS

BAD PRECEDENT

Andrew Jackson's assault on habeas corpus.

BY CALEB CRAIN

By late 1814, it was clear that America was not winning the War of 1812. Washington, including the Capitol and the White House, was in ashes. New Englanders were so demoralized that they were considering secession. When British troops, hardened from battling Napoleon, set sail for Louisiana, some feared that America might not be able to hold on to its recent acquisition.

Into the national gloom, however, light broke. On January 8, 1815, a major general from Tennessee named Andrew Jackson stopped the British from taking New Orleans. The battle lasted less than two hours, but more than two thousand British soldiers were killed or wounded, compared with only a few dozen Americans. The victory had almost no practical effect. Although the news hadn't yet reached the Western Hemisphere, British and American representatives had negotiated peace, on Christmas Eve at the Treaty of Ghent, restoring the prewar territorial boundaries. Nonetheless, Jackson's victory was a public-relations triumph. It "restored and inflamed the national self-love," as James Parton puts it in an elegant, pleasantly cynical 1860 biography. He achieved sudden and overwhelming popularity, which became, according to Parton, "the principal fact in the political history of the United States" for the next generation, a period that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., famously called the Age of Jackson.

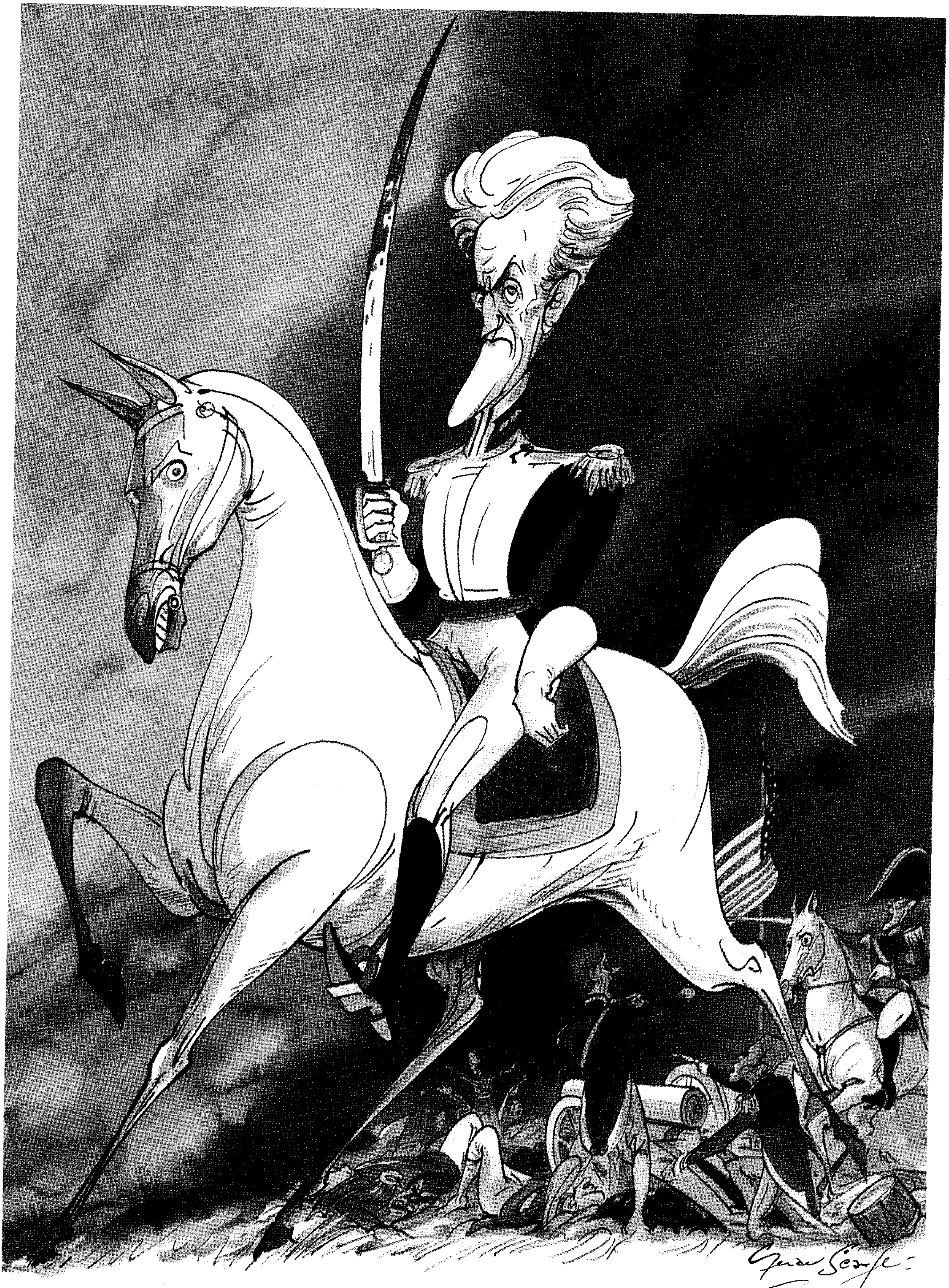
In the two months immediately following the Battle of New Orleans, however, Jackson put his glory in jeopardy, keeping a tight grip on civil liberties and seeming to take personally the restlessness of those under his control. He censored a newspaper, came close to executing two deserters, and jailed a state congressman, a judge, and a district attorney. He defied a writ of habeas corpus, the legal privilege recognized by the Constitution which allows someone being detained to insist that a judge look into his case. Jackson was fined for his actions, and, for the rest of his life, was shadowed by the charge that he had behaved tyrannically. In retirement, after two terms as President, he called on his reserves of political clout to get the fine refunded, and Congress ended up debating the legality of his actions in New Orleans for nearly two years. As Matthew Warshauer argues in a lucid and well-researched new book, "Andrew Jackson and the Politics of Martial Law" (University of Tennessee; $39.95), the debates changed the definition of martial law in American jurisprudence. They also set a precedent for granting emergency powers to the executive branch which remains a troubling legacy today.

A British visitor to America wrote that Jackson had "a game-cock look." He was a gaunt six feet one, with sallow skin, a lantern jaw, long, loose teeth, and iron-gray hair that stood straight up. A political enemy once likened him to an "exasperated rhinoceros." He relished violence almost to the point of connoisseurship. In fighting with a stick, he suggested aiming not for the head but the stomach; with a pistol, he advised aiming for the brain. Some thought that he stage-managed his ferocity for political effect. One anecdote has him chuckling in the Presidential office over an outburst ginned up to frighten away some petitioners: "Didn't I manage them well?" Whether this propensity sprang from nature or art, he knew how to put it to use. "What truly set him apart from other generals was his ability to motivate his men," H. W. Brands writes in an equable and fluent recent biography. For sticking by his troops when his superiors ordered him to abandon them Jackson was loved; his soldiers nicknamed him Old Hickory on account of his toughness. But for turning his cannons on soldiers who thought their term of enlistment shorter than he thought it was, and for having a teen-ager shot for refusing an order, he was feared. Like the God of the Old Testament, Jackson commanded both responses.

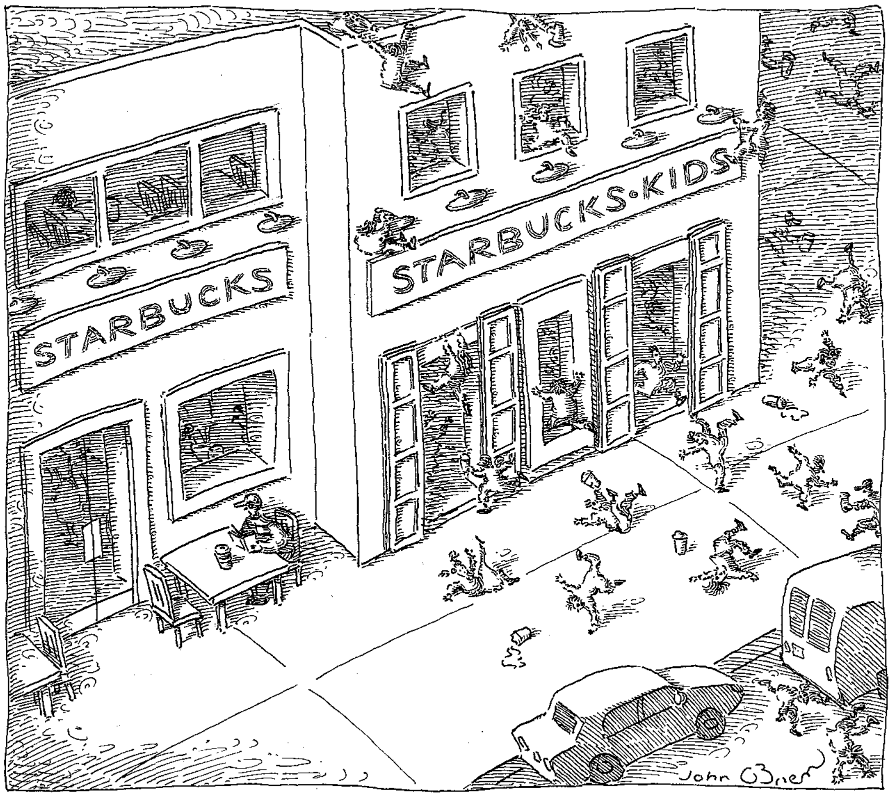
Shortly after reaching New Orleans, accordingly, Jackson threatened to kill collaborators. "Those who are not for us are against us," warned a broadside issued on his orders. The governor of Louisiana, William C. C. Claiborne, had described a "spirit of Disaffection" in the city, and there were indeed many opportunities for distrust. The British were thought to be encouraging the blacks to revolt, and the city's whites divided their loyalties between France, Spain, and the United States. Forty miles to the south, in the bay of Barataria, there were privateers, led by Jean Lafitte, a former blacksmith, and it was unclear which side they would take.

To reduce the uncertainties, Jackson recruited two battalions of free blacks. "Distrust them, and you make them your enemies," he explained to the governor; "place confidence in them, and you engage them by Every dear and honorable tie." He agreed to an amnesty for the pirates, in exchange for their support and a supply of arms and ammunition. The deal was probably brokered by Lafitte's longtime lawyer Edward Livingston, an ex-mayor of New York who had insinuated himself into Jackson's staff as aide-de-camp, French translator, speechwriter, and legal adviser. Livingston also had a hand in Jackson's most decisive

GERALD SCARFE



Jackson was a natural populist, but he also had a fiercely autocratic streak. One enemy likened him to an "exasperated rhinoceros."



step: on December 16, 1814, Jackson declared martial law.

As Warshauer explains, the term “martial law” originally referred only to “a code of conduct for the armed forces.” Among the British, it also came, in the course of putting down colonial rebellions, to mean military power over civilians during an emergency. But for Americans this second meaning long remained officially unthinkable. In the Declaration of Independence, the Founding Fathers had objected to having “the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.”

The subject was especially sensitive in New Orleans, because martial law had been attempted there in 1806, during the hysteria that followed accusations that Aaron Burr was conspiring to create a new nation in the Southwest. Then, Livingston had defended the civil rights of Burr’s alleged conspirators, and he now warned Jackson that martial law was unconstitutional. The only possible justification was necessity, and even then, Livingston said, “the General proclaims it at his risque and under his responsibility.” Another adviser, however, observed that the Constitution provides for the suspension of habeas corpus “in Cases of Rebellion or Invasion,” and suggested that this provision “authorizes . . . impliedly, the operation of Martial Law.” It was a weak rationale. The U.S. Supreme Court had recently ruled that only the legislature had the power to suspend habeas corpus—not the President, and certainly not a mere general. And, just days before Jackson’s proclamation, an American naval commander had asked the Louisiana legislature to suspend habeas corpus so that he could impress sailors, and they had refused.

Despite the constitutional irregularity, Jackson imposed a nine o’clock curfew and required that everyone entering and exiting the city be vetted by the military. The legislature insisted on continuing to meet, but its doorkeeper took a leave of absence and enlisted. A week later, the British landed.

“By the Eternal,” Jackson said, upon hearing of their landfall, “they shall not sleep on our soil!” The British prudently halted nine miles outside the city to await reinforcements. They set up camp, ate a large meal, built fires, swam, and made their beds. By contrast, Jackson, whose digestion was never good, ate no more than a few tablespoons of rice and half a cup of coffee that day and did not sleep for the next five days and four nights. He struck the British at seven-thirty the evening they landed.

It was the British troops’ first experience of Jackson’s aggressive style. Over the next two weeks, American scouts ventured into the no man’s land between camps at all hours to hunt British sentinels, a practice the British found barbarous and unnerving. Meanwhile, the Americans improvised a barricade of barrels and sugar casks, mortared with mud, about a mile long and protected in front by a ditch ten feet wide. Stuck between river and swamp, where firm soil was rare, they tried building with cotton, too, but it caught fire easily and had to be dug out again. The British tried sugar, which, the rank and file discovered, stopped no bullets but could be molded into cakes and eaten.

The Americans were soon well dug in on the east side of the river, but they had few troops and negligible entrenchments on the west, where the British decided to take advantage. Working day and night, the British quietly extended a canal to the Mississippi, planning to send boatloads of soldiers to the west bank the night before they attacked. For their assault on the east bank, they tied rods of sugarcane together into fascines, for crossing the Americans’ ditch, and built ladders, for storming their barricade.

At dawn on January 8th, the British fired a rocket into the air for coördination. It had the unintended effect of alerting the Americans, whose band launched into “Yankee Doodle.” Geography, too, was unpropitious. Few British boats made it out of the canal and across the river on schedule, either because the water level fell unexpectedly or because the British had failed to reckon on the reluctance of Louisiana mud to stay where it is put. Disadvantage turned to disaster, however, when the troops assigned to carry the fascines and ladders forgot them. British soldiers who managed to reach the American barricade could do nothing once they got there but wait to be shot down. Jackson didn’t realize he was vulnerable on the west side of the river until his victory on the east side was so complete that it didn’t matter. The post-battle tableau seemed to him an image of resurrection, as British survivors struggled to their feet amid heaps of the dead. The forgotten ladders were used as makeshift biers.

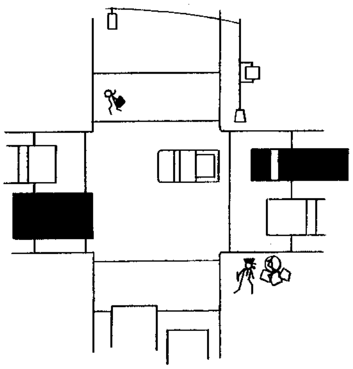
Even while the British still menaced New Orleans, the civil authorities had been fidgety under military rule. On Christmas Day, 1814, the mayor informed Jackson, courteously but pointedly, that so many people were being detained that "Before two days, The Guard house shall be full." On December 28th, because of rumors and garbled orders, a soldier with a bayonet refused to let the state's legislators into their chambers. They were not pleased. When the time came to thank the Army that had protected New Orleans, they named every senior officer but Jackson.

Victory made martial law seem less urgent, and its burdens less bearable. In February and March, thirty citizens were detained without being charged; at least one wrote to Jackson begging for a trial. As early as January 31st, Governor Claiborne began asking when Jackson planned to discharge the militia. On February 11th, a group of officers explained to Jackson that their militiamen needed to go home to sow their cotton. Some soldiers began to go absent without leave. After only fifteen to twenty men showed up for the February 2nd inspection of an entire regiment, Jackson warned, "I cannot permit the Laurels of Louisiana to be tarnished by the Lurking Demon of discord." Between January and March, he had a hundred soldiers arrested for mutiny, desertion, and lesser infractions. Two were court-martialled and sentenced to death, to be reprieved only on the day of their scheduled execution.

Louisianans were also impatient to recapture slaves who had run away with the British, but negotiations were delicate. The British did not want to be accused of plunder, but they were appalled by American slavery, and had qualms about forcing the slaves to return. One British officer later wrote about removing "a collar of spikes" from a fugitive named George. "He had not been able to lie down since his flight, the collar being so contrived as to prevent the wearer from using any other than an upright position." (Eventually, the British would drop the runaways off in Bermuda on their return trip across the Atlantic.) In early February, Jackson sent Livingston aboard a British frigate to parley for the return of slaves and an exchange of prisoners. To Livingston's surprise, the British detained him while they captured a fort near Mobile, in the war's last skirmish. Two days later, the ship received a London newspaper article about the Treaty of Ghent, which Livingston was able to carry back to New Orleans after his release.

Instead of celebrating, however, Jackson warned New Orleans that "an artful and insidious enemy" might be trying "to put you off your guard and attack you by surprise." He was ignored. On February 21st, the *Louisiana Gazette*, slightly embroidering the good news, claimed that the British had requested a ceasefire. Technically they hadn't yet, and Jackson demanded not only that the editor issue a correction but that no newspaper in the city print any such claim again without first consulting him. "As we have been *officially* informed that the city of New Orleans is a *camp*," the *Gazette* responded on February 23rd, "our readers must not expect us to take the liberty of expressing our opinion as we might in a *free city*." Jackson was losing control of the city and of his temper.

On the twenty-fourth, Governor Claiborne again asked Jackson to discharge the militia and instructed his attorney general to protect any civilian seized by Jackson's military. "I can no longer remain a Silent Spectator of the prostration of the Laws," Claiborne wrote. Meanwhile, a few French and Spanish residents figured out a way to spring themselves from the militia early. They applied to their consuls for certificates of citizenship, which exempted them from military duty. Warshauer reports that, in February and March, more than a hundred New Orleans residents were formally recognized as citizens of France by Louis de Tousard, the French consul.



Jackson countered by banishing from the city all newly certified Frenchmen, giving them three days to be at least as far away as Baton Rouge, a distance of about a hundred miles. The implication—that soldiers who suddenly avowed their allegiance to a foreign power were not to be trusted—deeply offended Consul Tousard, who had lost an arm fighting on America's behalf in the Revolutionary War. "*Une accusation aussi monstrueux—Contre des Français!*" he rebuked Jackson. Tousard was ordered to leave the city by four in the afternoon.

"It is high time the laws should resume their empire," an anonymous writer asserted in the *Louisiana Courier* of March 3rd. The writer mistakenly thought Jackson was banishing all New Orleans Frenchmen rather than just the newly certified ones, and he urged them to stay put. Enraged by the defiance, Jackson ordered another newspaper, the *Friend of the Laws*, to print part of an act of Congress that assigned the death penalty to spies found lurking in the Army's camp in wartime. Jackson soon discovered the writer's identity: it was Louis Louaillier, the chairman of ways and means in the state legislature, who had been instrumental both in the legislature's refusal to suspend habeas corpus and in its funding of the city's defense. At noon on March 5th, an Army captain arrested him by the Mississippi River levee, across from the Exchange Coffee House. Louaillier called on people nearby to act as witnesses, and one of them, a lawyer named Pierre L. Morel, agreed to help him.

Morel first approached a state appeals-court judge, François-Xavier Martin, who declined because he believed he had no jurisdiction. Then Morel went to the federal district judge, Dominick Augustin Hall. During the Aaron Burr panic of 1806, Hall had become something of a hero for issuing a writ of habeas corpus to free a fellow-judge. Perhaps he felt the time had come for a repeat performance. He signed the order for a writ, and asked Pierre Morel to take Jackson a note of advance warning.

As it happens, Martin, the judge who turned Morel down, went on to write a history of New Orleans, and he describes well what happened next: "On

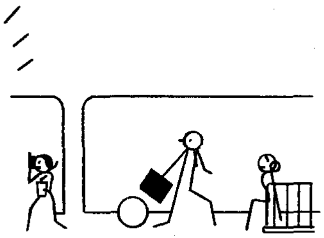
BRIEFLY NOTED

Surveillance, *by Jonathan Raban (Pantheon; $24).* "Topically inconclusive" is Lucy Bengstrom's ambition for a magazine article she's writing on the author of a best-selling wartime memoir, and a similar notion seems to underpin this novel, set in Seattle in the near future. Plots are left hanging in a fretful atmosphere of tightening public security and disintegrating private stability. Lucy probes her subject's story and begins to doubt its veracity; her neighbor Tad, an actor, plays roles like Man Being Dug from Rubble in informational films made by the Department of Homeland Security. While the characters agonize over the war on terror, Raban's sense of political urgency edges toward bluster and trips up his more penetrating comic agility. But as Tad furiously researches anti-Administration conspiracy theories online, humor and anger yield a sharp picture of the secret gratifications of outrage: "This was being in hate, and Tad, when truthful with himself, had to acknowledge that he liked being in hate. A lot."

Conjugal Love, *by Alberto Moravia, translated from the Italian by Marina Harss (Other; $14).* A wealthy, idle man with literary aspirations retreats to an isolated villa in Tuscany with his new wife, where they make a pact: to abstain from sex until he finishes writing a story. The only intrusion is a local barber, who arrives daily to give the husband a shave—and possibly put the moves on the wife. In other hands, these would be the ingredients of farce, but Moravia, who died in 1990 and is considered one of the preëminent Italian writers of the twentieth century, delivers something at once more bitter and more tender: a parable of marriage—"that odd mixture of violent devotion and legitimate lust," in which desire eventually gives way to "a forced and decorous composure"—that captures the essential opacity of even one's most intimate partner.

Chrysalis, *by Kim Todd (Harcourt; $27).* In this spellbinding biography, Todd interweaves the life of Maria Sibylla Merian, a German artist and naturalist who became famous in the seventeenth century for her engravings of caterpillars, with the intellectual and scientific history of metamorphosis. At a time when theories of spontaneous generation were popular, and when most naturalists contented themselves with specimens pinned behind glass, Merian believed "in what could not be encased—the moment-by-moment shifts." Her work led her to Amsterdam, where curiosities arriving on trading ships prompted her, at the age of fifty-two, to sell her belongings for passage to Surinam. The engravings of the bugs she saw there brought the strange, delicate environment of the Americas to vibrant life, and revealed the complexities of insect mutation and regeneration. Todd points out the difficulties—competing theories and superstitions, exceptions for every rule—faced by natural scientists in Merian's day, and hears their echo in modern-day entomology.

City of Laughter, *by Vic Gatrell (Walker; $45).* During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Georgian England suffered a mad king, the loss of its American colonies, and the growing influence of revolutionary radicalism drifting across the Channel from France. In spite of this, and even because of it, social and political satire, as Gatrell shows in his exhilarating history, never had it better. Color printmakers took advantage of (and promulgated) liberated attitudes toward sex, bodily functions, and the British royalty. Gatrell's book features nearly three hundred irreverently foul examples, to which he is an entertaining and appropriately digressive guide. In his hands, the prints provide a bewildering, sometimes nauseating, but ultimately enlightening portrait of a vigorously satirical time that lasted until the great settling down of the Victorian era.



receiving Morel's communication, the ebullition of Jackson's anger was such, that reason appeared to have lost its control." Jackson became convinced that Hall and Louaillier were involved in a conspiracy and decided to defy the writ. He instructed the man in charge of guarding Louaillier, Lieutenant Colonel Mathew Arbuckle, to arrest anyone who tried to serve a writ of habeas corpus and to arrest Judge Hall. "You will [be] vigilent," he wrote. "The agents of the enemy amongst us are more numerous than was first expected." At nine in the evening, a force of at least sixty of Arbuckle's men seized Hall in his bedroom and took him back to Louaillier's cell. Around midnight, Jackson compelled the court clerk to surrender Hall's order for the writ. To the district marshal, who stopped by Army headquarters that night, he boasted that he "had shopped the Judge."

On Monday, March 6th, a special courier arrived who was supposed to be carrying an official announcement of peace from Washington. By an unfortunate mishap, a completely different letter had ended up in the satchel. Jackson nevertheless relayed the fact of the special courier to the British, writing that there was "little Doubt in my mind that the treaty" had been ratified. Over the next couple of days, he also discharged the bulk of Louisiana's militia and quietly dropped his demand that the "new" French leave town. But he was unrelenting toward Hall and Louaillier. On March 7th, Louaillier was tried by a court-martial for mutiny, being a spy, and disobedience of orders, among other charges. Although his life was in jeopardy, Louaillier refused, as a matter of principle, to answer the charges except by objecting to the court's jurisdiction. He was acquitted, but Jackson still refused to release him. Instead, in a wild and rambling opinion, he insisted that the legislator was guilty of "inviting the enemy to renew his attempt." He also reconciled the discrepancy between the American and British understanding of martial law—between military discipline and emergency powers—by asserting that in this case there wasn't any. A commanding general had an autocratic authority within his Army's camp; it so happened that New Orleans was now inside Andrew Jackson's.

On the evening of the court-martial, someone destroyed a large portrait of Jackson, which hung in the grand hall of the Exchange Coffee House. Jackson's officers ordered a replacement and then guarded it. On March 8th, federal district attorney John Dick petitioned Joshua Lewis, a Louisiana district judge, for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of Hall. Jackson promptly ordered Dick and Lewis arrested.

Perhaps Jackson began to feel uneasy about detaining a federal judge. On March 11th, he wrote Hall that he had decided to "send you beyond the limits of my encampment" until he received official notification of peace. The next day, a Sunday, five soldiers escorted Hall four miles upriver. He did not have to wait there long. At dawn on Monday morning, a second special courier arrived in New Orleans; this time the right letter was in his satchel, as well as a copy of the peace treaty itself. Jackson lifted martial law, pardoned military offenses, and released detainees. With Livingston's assistance, he framed an apologia for the rigor he was now setting aside. "Is it wise," he asked rhetorically, "to sacrifice the spirit of the laws to the letter, and by adhering too strictly to the letter, lose the *substance* forever, in order that we may, for an instant, preserve the *shadow*?"

A week and a half after Judge Hall's banishment, Dick accused Jackson of improperly seizing the order for a writ of habeas corpus, disregarding the writ itself, and imprisoning the judge who had issued it. Andrew Jackson was summoned to Hall's court to explain why he should not be examined, and perhaps punished, for contempt.

Spectators gave three cheers when he entered the courtroom, and Hall threatened to adjourn if there were any further interruptions. According to a contemporary newspaper account, Jackson said to the judge, "I pledge my life there shall be no interruption on my part," and offered a written reply to the charges. He then asked to be excused because his wife wasn't feeling well. A heavyset woman, Rachel Jackson had arrived in the city just in time for a series of victory balls, where high society marvelled at a sight described by one merchant as "the General, a long, haggard man, with limbs like a skeleton, and Madame la Generale, a short, fat dumpling, bobbing opposite each other" on the dance floor.

John Reid, one of Jackson's officers, began to read aloud from the reply, but Dick objected, wanting to know in advance "its nature & tendency." Hall agreed to hear passages that challenged the court's jurisdiction, contradicted the alleged facts, argued that the alleged facts did not constitute a contempt, apologized to the court, or demonstrated that Jackson had acted within his legal rights. Reid then continued reading. He soon reached a passage setting forth evidence for the necessity of martial law in New Orleans, and Dick objected again. A defendant was not "permitted to make evidence for himself," Dick said. Though Hall had said he was willing to hear challenges to the facts, Dick asserted that the proper moment for that was later—when Jackson was questioned under oath, if Hall decided that was necessary. At the outset, Jackson's defense team was supposed to raise only questions of law. Hall agreed. He assured Reid that what the general said later, on the stand, would prevail over any and all other evidence, but for now Reid could raise only questions about jurisdiction and the mode of the proceedings. Reid, however, now revealed that "he was not before that Court as the Counsel of Genl. Jackson" and had no authority to do anything but read the paper he was holding. Therefore Dick presented his side of the case unchallenged, and Jackson was ordered to return for questioning.

It was a puzzling standoff. Livingston had drafted Jackson's reply and was sitting in the courtroom when Reid was prevented from reading it out. One of the sharpest legal minds in America, he must have foreseen Dick's objections, and, in any case, would have been more than capable of making a verbal defense of Jackson on the spot. Martin, in his history, theorized that Livingston deliberately formulated a reply that would be rejected, so that Jackson would be able to claim "he had been condemned unheard."

Sure enough, when Jackson appeared in court on March 31st, in mufti, he refused to answer any questions, telling Hall, "Sir, my defence in this accusation has been offered, and you have denied its admission." Perhaps it was a piece of Livingston's strategy, too, that the courtroom that day was full of unruly Baratarian pirates, one of whom shouted out an offer to throw the judge in the river. According to a biography that Jackson authorized, Jackson silenced the courtroom. "The same arm that protected from outrage this city . . . will shield and protect this court, or perish in the effort," he declared. According to a contemporary newspaper account, however, he egged the crowd on, telling Hall that, during the British threat that had made martial law necessary, "I was then with these brave fellows in arms . . . you were not, sir."

Hall found Jackson in contempt of court, but in consideration of his service to the nation chose not to imprison him; instead, he was fined a thousand dollars. After Jackson left court, cheering crowds took him from coffeehouse to coffeehouse. The accounts vary; he either railed about Hall's specious charges or urged his followers to "not forget the example I have given this day of a respectful submission to the administration of justice." A letter to a friend has his unmediated voice: "I have been detained here longer than I expected, by a combination of a few Traitors & tories—with Judge Hall at there head—who . . . are much chagrend because the country has been saved from the Lyons grasp."

In early March, while Jackson was still jailing public officials, Governor Claiborne had written to Washington in alarm. Because of the slowness of the mail, it was not until late April that a letter from the Acting Secretary of War, Alexander James Dallas, reached Jackson, who was on his way home to Tennessee.

"It would appear," Dallas wrote, "that the Judicial power of the United States has been resisted, the liberty of the press has been suspended, & the Consul and subjects of a friendly Government have been exposed to great inconvenience, by an exercise of Military force and command." The President, James Madison, wanted to know what was going on. Jackson forwarded to Dallas his written reply to the contempt charges and shared his suspicion that he had been finked on by one of "those who would have betrayed their Country, or skulked from its defence."

This was not the answer Dallas had

been hoping for, and he wrote again a few months later. The President was happy to learn that Jackson justified his acts by their necessity. "Some difference of opinion will naturally occur . . . as to the extent, or the duration, of the alledged necessity," Dallas continued, but the Administration was going to take Jackson's word for it. Still, the President didn't want his silence to be misunderstood. In the United States, only Congress has the power to declare martial law. If a commander tries to declare it, "he may be justified by the law of necessity, while he has the merit of saving his country, but he cannot resort to the established law of the land, for the means of vindication."

Jackson was being told, in plain English, that what he had done was illegal. That had to be put on the record, because if the New Orleans episode were to create a precedent it would undermine the Constitution. As Madison himself had written in "The Federalist Papers," "The accumulation of all powers legislative, executive and judiciary in the same hands . . . may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny." Because voters were acclaiming Jackson as a national savior, Madison probably felt that he couldn't afford to confront him more aggressively, but Warshauer thinks that he should have, perhaps with a formal reprimand. "Madison's failure to act," he writes persuasively, "opened a gaping hole in the future protection of civil liberties."

Dallas's letter was not without effect, though. Even after Jackson's eventful Presidency—during which he moved thousands of Indians across the country, undermined the national bank, faced down South Carolina's attempt to nullify federal law, and triggered a new vehemence in partisan politics—he still remembered the letter as "justifying my acts, but leaving a sting behind." To extract this sting, he called on allies in Congress, in 1842, to pass a bill refunding him the fine. It wasn't easy at first, because Jackson's enemies, the Whigs, controlled both the House and the Senate. But it slowly dawned on Jackson's Democrats that they had been handed a wonderful issue for energizing the base: a war hero was being stiffed by Congress. In the 1842 elections, the refund issue helped them take the House.

Some of the skirmishing was petty. The Whigs changed the bill's title from "A Bill to Indemnify . . ." to "A Bill for the Relief of . . . ," to make it sound like an act of charity. (Jackson was in fact short of cash.) But the politicians also addressed the issues. Democrats argued that necessity had made Jackson's acts in New Orleans constitutional, or at least legal; or, at worst, that it rendered the question of legality moot. "Talk to me not about rules and forms in court," declaimed Stephen Douglas, Lincoln's future rival, in his maiden speech in the House, "when the enemy's cannon are pointed at the door, and the flames encircle the cupola!" The Whigs, on the other hand, called Jackson's acts both unconstitutional and unnecessary. John Quincy Adams, who sided with the Whigs on the issue, warned his colleagues, "If you pass this bill it will not be for the honor and glory of the battle of New Orleans, but for the honor and glory of the exercise of despotic power over your own citizens." The Whigs tried repeatedly to add to the bill a sentence disavowing any censure of Judge Hall, but they failed. On January 8, 1844, the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans, it passed by a landslide.

By surveying changes in law compendia and military treatises, edition by edition, Warshauer shows that America's legal community finally accepted the new meaning of martial law in the eighteen-forties, probably because the refund debates put it into currency. Indeed, when Rhode Island declared martial law in 1842, a contemporary blamed the "damnable heresies preached in the halls of Congress." On the debate's afterlife, Warshauer's findings are even more intriguing. When Lincoln needed to justify his restriction of civil liberties in the early eighteen-sixties, he cited the 1844 refund as demonstrating Congress's approval of Jackson's declaration of martial law, calculating that nothing would silence his Democratic opponents so well as the example of Andrew Jackson. Warshauer finds nine politicians and commentators who lived long enough to debate both Jackson's refund and the Civil War–era suspensions of habeas corpus. A Whig congressman who had called necessity the "universal plea of tyrants" in 1844 found himself declaring martial law in Maryland in 1863. The three Democrats in Warshauer's sample supported Jackson's declaration of martial law but didn't trust Lincoln with the same powers. One of them, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, wrote privately to Jackson in 1844 that "a grosser act of injustice was never perpetrated by any court, than the infliction of that fine upon you," but upbraided Lincoln bitterly in his Ex Parte Merryman decision of 1861, warning Americans that if the military could suspend the writ of habeas corpus at will, they might "no longer [be] living under a government of laws." So egregious is Taney's flip-flop that Warshauer suspects that he cared more about thwarting Lincoln than about habeas corpus. In fact, Warshauer ends up doubting that politicians are even capable of rising above partisanship on the issue.

The evidence certainly suggests that it has always been difficult to find a reliable base of support for habeas corpus in America; it's a vulnerable right, especially during emergencies and when a charismatic leader is involved. ("In free governments, dangerous precedents are to be dreaded from good and popular characters only," Martin warned.) Maybe the solution to this dilemma, like so many others in American politics, is to be found in fruitful conflict between the executive, judiciary, and legislative branches. The jurist Abraham D. Sofaer has suggested that, in Jackson's predicament, checks and balances were rather well distributed: so long as generals and Presidents who exceed the Constitution are vulnerable to the courts and to Congress, as Jackson was vulnerable to Hall, emergency powers are less likely to turn into permanent ones. One could argue that, by that logic, smoothing over the conflicts removes an important check on executive power; it was a mistake for the 1844 Congress to refund Jackson's fine, and a mistake for the 2006 Congress to deprive the detainees in Guantánamo Bay of the writ of habeas corpus, helping President Bush maneuver around the Supreme Court's ruling in Hamdan v. Rumsfeld. If the President takes away a civil right, he should have to worry about explaining himself to the people. He should fear as well as love us. ♦

BOOKS

CLASSICS GALORE

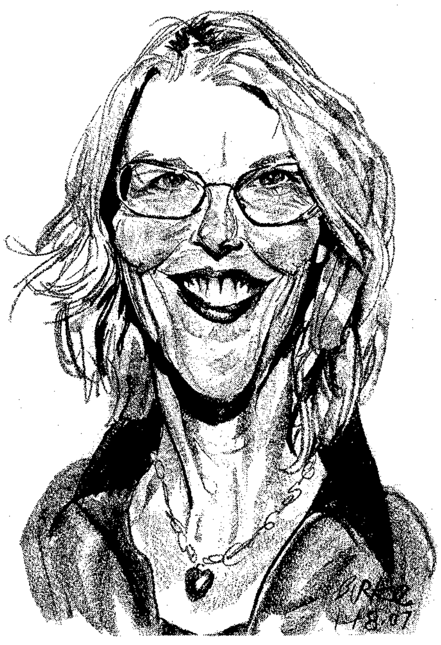
Boccaccio in Hollywood.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Jane Smiley's capacious new novel, "Ten Days in the Hills" (Knopf; $26), does not give the reader a warm welcome—the first chapter is cloying and confusing—but accommodates him amply enough so that at the end, four hundred and fifty pages later, he is reluctant to leave. The ten chapters are named for ten successive days; the first, "DAY ONE · Monday, March 24, 2003," comes five days after the U.S.-led coalition initiated the second Gulf War. More than seven thousand miles from Baghdad, in Pacific Palisades, California, within sight of the Getty Center shining on its hill, a woman simply called Elena awakes, full of memories of last night's Academy Awards ceremony, which she attended with her lover, Max, a well-known, if recently idle, director whose name is Nathan Maxwell, Anglicized (it is thought) from Milstein. She is fifty, he is fifty-eight. They met "in the cheese section at Gelson's last Easter, when Max was buying a Piave and Elena was buying a Gruyère de Comté and their hands touched as they both reached for the Époisses." They are still reaching for happiness together, and the reader is thrust into the middle of their mutual fascination. Max expresses the desire to make a movie, on the model of "My Dinner with André," called "My Lovemaking with Elena." She contemplates his penis, fondly dubbed the Big Classic after they searched for its match in a dildo shop: "It lay over to the side, not a straight, evenly shaped sausage, but more of a baguette, bulging comfortably in the middle and then narrowing just below the cap." Physical facts and sensations are not stinted in the novel; as in "My Dinner with André," there is no apparent hurry. He kisses her:

> The sensation of his lips on hers flowered along her cranial nerves, which she imagined fanning outward from her lips over and around her head like a spiderweb, and within that web was a darkness whose life she could better sense when her eyes were closed. When her eyes were open, she was all surface, facing the world. When her eyes were closed, she was all hollow, facing inward.

Similarly biform, each chapter is roughly half talk and half sex. The sexual descriptions set a new mark for explicitness in a work of non-pornographic intent. Smiley works in close focus, and from a male as well as a female point of view. A differently placed kiss:



Jane Smiley

> He kissed her again, and then pulled her labia into his mouth and ran his tongue over them. He could feel her clitoris begin to touch his upper lip. . . . Suddenly she shivered and cried out, and the aroma of her sex mushroomed around him, tangy and rich and erotic. "Ah ah ah ah ooh!" she said, and a moment later pushed his head away.

The talk, when the characters come up for air, ranges widely but keeps reverting to the Iraq war and the movie business. The acknowledgments at the book's end thank "every director and commentator on every DVD who bothered to add 'Special Features,' " and there can be no doubt that Smiley, whose previous novels have abundantly shared information on farming, horses, real estate, and medieval Scandinavian settlements in Greenland, has done her DVD research with characteristic thoroughness. Movies—classic and obscure, real and imaginary—pepper the conversation as Max's house suddenly fills up with guests. Realizing that his lovemaking with Elena this morning will be, thanks to the Big Classic's curious lack of coöperation, all foreplay, he ventures to the bathroom and reports, "The house is full of people." "How many people?" Elena asks. "Do we know them?" He answers, "Stoney, Charlie, Delphine, Cassie, Isabel, and Simon." Two more guests, the actress and singer Zoe Cunningham and her lover and guru Paul Schmidt, show up and invite themselves to stay, which brings to a tidy ten the cast of this modern-day "Decameron."

Of the ten, Max is a reputable director, Zoe a famous star, and Stoney Whipple an agent, the relatively laid-back son of the legendary, recently deceased agent Jerry Whipple, born Hillel Goldman. The others are linked by kinship or friendship to these workers in the film industry: Delphine is Zoe's mother, Cassie Marshall, "notoriously well connected," runs an art gallery and is Delphine's best friend, Simon McCracken is Elena's twenty-year-old son by a former conjunction, Isabel is Max and Zoe's twenty-three-year-old daughter by their previous marriage to each other. Charlie Mannheim, the least Hollywood-flavored of the lot, has been Max's buddy since they were boys in New Jersey. He still lives in New Jersey, though he no longer works for the Pepsi-Cola corporation, and is separated from his wife, who bore him five children. The group has some ethnic diversity: Elena is a Midwesterner of Scandinavian blood, and Delphine a black Jamaican, which makes Zoe and Isabel, though both had white fathers, women of color. Isabel, as it happens, has been surreptitiously sleeping with Stoney since she was sixteen, and Paul, in a coincidence that doesn't go anywhere, was bullied as a child by Max, who doesn't recognize him behind his luxuriant guru's beard.

In their ten days of living together,

the ten characters generate more chatter than drama. Simon impulsively, meaning no harm, punches Paul and knocks him off a kitchen barstool. Zoe, again impulsively, sleeps with Simon; when she blithely confesses to a displeased Paul, he asks, in good therapeutic manner, "Does that seem to you to have been appropriate?" She answers, "I don't know. It was fun. He's nice. I realize he punched you, but I'd sort of forgotten about that by the late afternoon." Charlie, feeling out of place, supports the Administration's position on Iraq and watches Isabel and Stoney copulate beside a swimming pool, then joins them in conversation about his pills (twenty-one a day), the herbal cure for his high P.S.A., and his negative take on Isabel's mother's hairy new lover. Some of this behavior teeters on the edge of the acceptable, but Smiley has put herself on the edge of acceptable novel writing, replacing plot and suspense with something freer and more lifelike—casual talk, generally inconsequential but creating a lattice of cross-purpose in which emotions and attractions extend their tendrils.

When, in the seventh chapter, the house party moves, entire, higher into the hills, to a preposterously palatial Bel-Air mansion being remodelled by a Russian plutocrat called Mike, who wants Max to make a movie of Gogol's violent, somewhat anti-Semitic historical tale "Taras Bulba," things get a bit more eventful: children and parents have it out; lovers part or confirm their unions; and the mansion's two maids, Russians named Monique and Marya, interact with the guests. The funniest, most outrageous, and most revelatory sex scene occurs when Monique, a thirty-three-year-old beauty, emerges from a secret corridor into Charlie's bedroom. Bored with her life in the uncompleted palace, she has sized up the ten strangers and "thought I might find some entertainment among you." Also, Charlie patted her derrière while she was serving dinner, and in revenge she playfully spanks him. Fussy about his sleep, obsessed with his many medications, he grumpily resists her impudent provocations, declining an invitation to spank her in turn. When she tells him that, in her view, "most Americans are narrow-minded, ignorant, and provincial," he feels his face go red, and she quickly says, "So now are you ready to spank me? I have insulted your country; Americans hate that sort of thing." Monique is of a type rather new to American fiction's provinces, a post-Communist Russian, saucily enriching the free world with her native energy and bluntness. Finding hypochondriacal Charlie unresponsive, she demonstrates the successful use of a vibrator and admits to adoring her fellow-maid Marya's breasts:

> "Just today, while you in the dining room were eating your main course, we went into the pantry while Raphael wasn't looking, and I opened her shirt, which has snaps, you see, and then her bra, which has a front hook, and I sucked her tits like mad and also squatted down and brought myself. That's why we were a little late picking up the plates. I didn't even have time to wash my hands."

So much blithe sluttiness does at last excite the aging American, yet when he consummates his arousal in her body she sulks, saying, "I think penetration is going a little far." Charlie replies with American pragmatism, "There's nothing you can do about it now." Monique admits, "Your attitude seems quite strange to me." The twists of libido are wound into a cultural exchange, and the anatomy of our inward hollows is illuminated to surprising and comic effect.

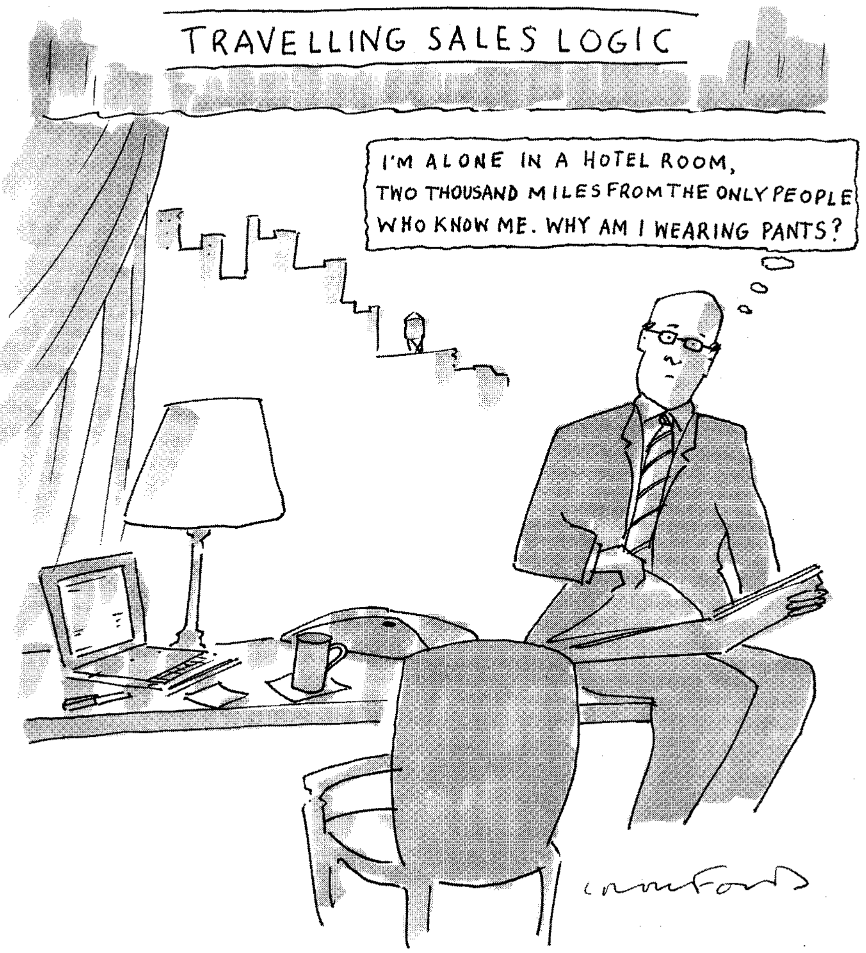
Male arousal (not female, which seems to be pretty constant) is a main theme. Max's impotence on Day One has something to do with the Iraq war and Elena's furious, irrepressibly vocal dislike of it: "She had been wondering whether it was time to make that behavioral connection—war–angry woman–impotence—that would show that the failure was her fault." His potency revives ("It felt like he was entering her up to her throat, that's how big he was") on Day Nine, with the stimulus of a video camera handheld by her. The camera is symbolic, perhaps, of the return of his creative vocation. He is turned on, after much sensible reluctance, by the prospect of directing a remake of "Taras Bulba"; a previous film version came out in 1962, starring Yul Brynner.

The Iraq war, in its opening and apparently triumphant weeks, is analogous to the Black Death, which forms the background of "The Decameron." Having evoked the full horror of the collapse of civil order in fourteenth-century Florence, Boccaccio conjures up an idyll of civilized society in the nearby countryside. His ten refugees from the city—seven women and three men (unlike the five and five of "Ten Days in the Hills," and with no overt sexual interaction)—establish a model of decorous mutual entertainment, ten stories each for ten days, each day ruled by a rotating moderator, a "king" or a "queen." With the aid of servants conveniently brought along, all is delight and abundance and beauty, though some of the narratives are cruel and bawdy. Smiley's brief essay on "The Decameron" in her previous book, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel" (2005), couldn't be more admiring:

> The ten young people form a perfect comic society, surrounded by beauty and abundance that they can fully appreciate. . . . The treasury of detail in The Decameron defies analysis, or even sufficient appreciation. The reader . . . can only appreciate each brilliant turn of phrase or each exquisite irony or each perfect set piece and then move on to the next, allowing them, afterward, to coexist imperfectly but delightfully in the memory, until her enjoyment is renewed with another reading.

"Ten Days in the Hills," unable to subdue its modern matter to a late-medieval courtliness and formality, strives for, and to an impressive extent achieves, a kindred richness. "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel," a lavish trove of sharp perceptions and firm opinions, includes the author's vision of her next novel—that is, the present one, foreseen as "spherical and self-contained, but jammed with things, like a spaceship made of Venetian glass, shining, intricate, and full of colors." The novel's pampered, restless Hollywood types, sheltered in two luxurious houses, the second of which is shot through with Byzantine fantasy, regale one another with stories from their lives, or found in the newspapers, and end each day, as people do in Hollywood, with a privately screened movie. Art of a sort is always on their minds, and their conversation and copulation possess, against the background of a distant tactical war, the benign glow of peaceful activity.

Smiley's introduction to "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel" contains some abruptly confessional sentences. She tells us that in 2001, when she turned fifty-two and the World


TRAVELLING SALES LOGIC
I'M ALONE IN A HOTEL ROOM, TWO THOUSAND MILES FROM THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO KNOW ME. WHY AM I WEARING PANTS?
crawford

Trade Center was destroyed, she became stuck two-thirds of the way through a novel called "Good Faith." Her dutiful, efficient life—"no drinking, no drugs, personal modesty and charm, good behavior on as many fronts as I could manage, a public life of agreeability and professionalism"—foundered on fear, "fear of anthrax, fear of nuclear terrorism, fear of flying, fear of the future." At the same time, her "lover and partner" was diagnosed with heart disease and underwent some procedures that made her fear that she "would be bereft of his physical presence," a gingerly phrasing that hints at religious belief: "I tried to remind myself of the illusory nature of the world and my conviction that death is a transition, not an end, to discipline my fears."

In "Ten Days in the Hills," the yoga adept and holy man Paul assures the others of the illusory nature of the world, and Elena, pondering her lover's impotence, hypothesizes that he can love her "only if who she was was not so potent and concentrated as to irradiate him with the full intensity of her fears." Of these many characters, Smiley most fully inhabits Elena, but she seems to approve most fully of Zoe, who emerges in the novel's last pages as its heroine. Zoe, an indifferent mother and a fickle lover, at the age of forty-three still dominates any room she enters, and is possessed of a sublime carelessness. Stoney observes:

> Deep in her heart . . . she didn't care about men and her effect on them, or else she didn't care about her effect on anyone, men or women. . . . While Zoe was talking vivaciously, being friendly and affectionate and entertaining, and even seductive, Stoney saw that it meant nothing. . . . There was nothing she wanted even from her mother.

(She and her non-attached guru are a good match, and their bodies know it. She and Max, for all their glamour, weren't: "Their bodies didn't get along. Where his eye was, there was her elbow. When he was awake, she was asleep. When she was awake, he was snoring. . . . They could not walk in step, and often didn't hear what each other said, even though they both had resonant voices.") Zoe's uncanny indifference helps her in negotiations: "They think they have to make her care, and of course they think the way to do that is money and perks and points and stuff. But she doesn't really seem to care about that, either, so they offer more." In the novel's last pages, when she has returned to her own home, we learn that "what she really liked, in the end, was a little stage in a little club, with Tony at the piano and good acoustics." She cares about singing, and, moved by hearing her singing in her room, the Russian staff in Mike's house has smuggled into the trunk of her car a painting that looks as serene and tender as a Vermeer but is more likely by "a woman of the period named Judith Leyster." In it, a young girl looks up from playing the recorder, about to smile, happy "in spite of deaths, in spite of the plagues and the fires and the massacres and the genocides and the clashes of armies and civilizations."

Smiley's raunchy survey of the human condition comes down to an endorsement of art and the relatively selfless, guileless artist. Her own art often warms itself at other works: in "A Thousand Acres," she needed "King Lear" to get at all she knew about Iowa and farm life; "Ten Days in the Hills" not only channels "The Decameron" but holds an odd ghost of what is passingly alluded to as "the siege of Troy." Elena/Helen, mated with Max/Menelaus, is abducted, spiritually speaking, by Paul/Paris; the tenuous parallel helps explain the two peripheral women, Cassie and Delphine, who, like Cassandra and the Delphic oracle, can do little but offer ignored wisdom. Even if this ghost of a myth exists only in the critic's eye, two books discussed in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Novel"—"Taras Bulba" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin"—do figure in our Hollywood talkfest, and our hostess is herself a writer: Elena is composing, amid the mess of human imprecision, a tome with the schoolmarmish title "Here's How: To Do EVERYTHING Correctly!" In such an oblique self-parody, one can see the author smile. ♦

THE ART WORLD

MYSTERY TRAIN

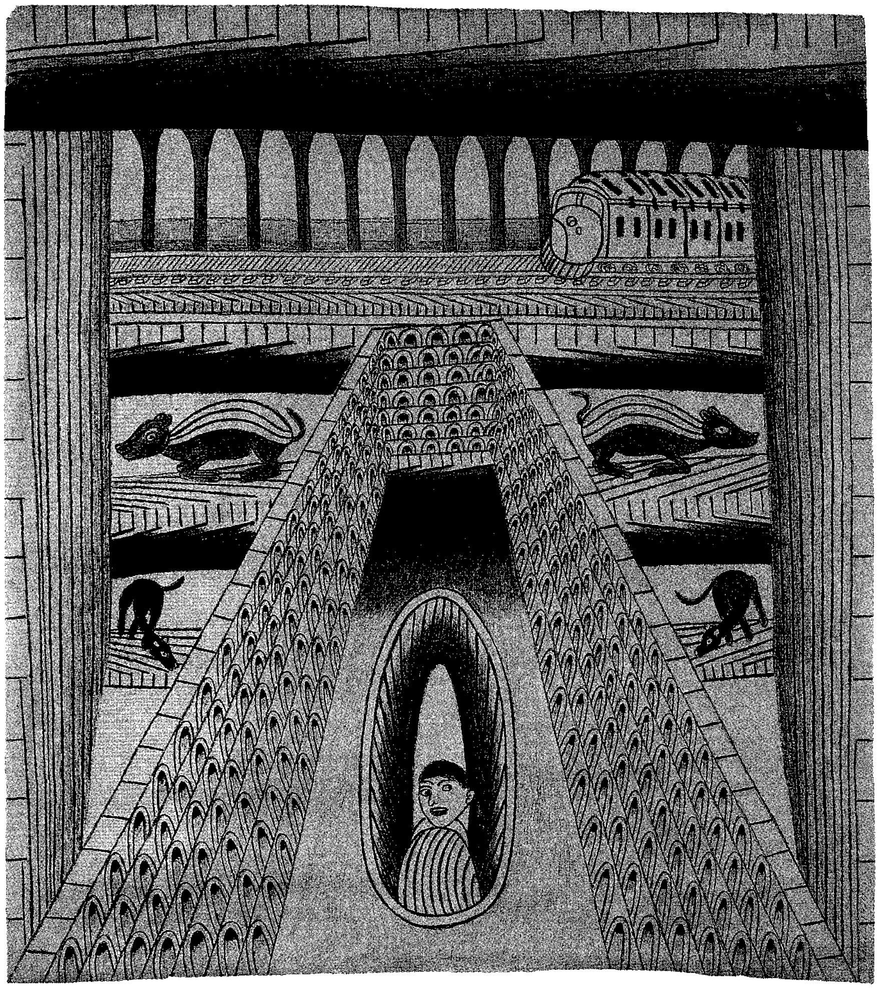
Martín Ramírez, outsider.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Martín Ramírez, a Mexican laborer who spent the last thirty-two of his sixty-eight years, until his death, in 1963, as an inmate of California mental hospitals, is my favorite outsider artist. Come to that, he's one of my favorite artists, period. His retrospective at the American Folk Art Museum is a marvel and a joy. The power of his often large drawings of trains, horsemen, and madonnas almost renders moot the old, crabbed issue of outsiderness, the wildwood creativity of asocial and eccentric—perhaps mad—loners, which is sentimentalized by some art people and shunned by most. Ramírez remains obscure, though his work has been widely shown since it was discovered by art-world insiders (the Chicago artist Jim Nutt and the dealer Phyllis Kind), in the late nineteen-sixties. Outsider art—lately euphemized as "self-taught," a vapid label that inconveniently describes originality in general—comes from and goes nowhere in art history. (The outsider is a culture of one.) It defeats normal criticism's tactics of context and comparison. It is barbaric. Can we skirt the imbroglio and regard Ramírez as an ordinary artist with extraordinary qualities? Let's see.

Remarkably little is known of him. From a family of sharecroppers in the conservative, largely Spanish-Creole state of Jalisco, Ramírez became a small rancher, with a wife and four children. Local legend remembers him as a superb horseman. In 1925, deeply in debt, he joined a mighty flow of Mexican workers to the United States for temporary railroad and mining jobs. Starting in 1926, the three-year Cristero Rebellion—in which pious Catholics battled the Draconian anticlerical measures of President Plutarco Elias Calles—raged in Jalisco. Tens of thousands died, on both sides. The Ramírez ranch was devastated. Recent research has uncovered a strange tale: Ramírez misunderstood a letter from home to say that his wife had joined the hated Federal forces, and he vowed never to return. In any case, the family lost track of him for years and, but for a nephew's visit in 1952, had no further contact with him. In 1931, he was picked up by police, apparently deracinated, in San Joaquin County, California, and committed to Stockton State Hospital. In 1948, he was moved to DeWitt State Hospital, near Sacramento. It seems that he made drawings from at least the late twenties on. A sheaf of them sent from Stockton to his family, in 1948, was hung outdoors and later destroyed. What survives is only his mature work, from fifteen years at DeWitt, in a style that must have undergone considerable evolution. Ramírez attracted the enthusiastic attention of Tarmo Pasto, a psychologist and artist who collected and showed his drawings—one exhibition was called "The Art of a Schizophrene"—and provided him with materials and privileges. In a corner of a ward of some seventy inmates, Ramírez alone had a worktable. He rarely spoke but had, by all accounts, a pleasant disposition. He was given a diagnosis of incurable schizophrenia, tending toward catatonia. Could he have handled normal life among his own people in rural Mexico? There's no telling now.

Rhythmic, expertly managed compositions carve out pictorial space in either, or both, of two ways: with straight hatchings that establish stepped, stagelike recesses; or with curved hatchings that describe receding mounds and valleys. A horseman (at times, a woman), festooned with banderillas and aiming a cocked pistol, or the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, a snake at her feet, com-



An accessible happiness: Ramírez's "Untitled (Courtyard)," 1954.

monly inhabits the proscenium. Trains or lines of cars slither amid the mounds, entering or exiting dark tunnels. Incidental figures and decorative motifs are deftly integrated in extended formats as much as eight feet high or ten feet long. Except for many reworkings of the horseman—which I surmise was popular with Ramírez's audience at DeWitt—variation of design and image is constant, full of surprises. The imagery—which includes stags and other animals, cityscapes with churches, and mysterious arcades—looks childlike but is far from crude. Figures that are jiggered together from odd shapes and objects that are reduced to simple geometries bespeak choice; they aren't failed attempts at representation but refined emblems. Paul Klee and Saul Steinberg, among other modern artists, come to mind, but Ramírez's command of pictorial construction, a kind of strictly paced visual music, is all his own.

Technically, most of Ramírez's drawings aren't drawings at all but encaustic-like paintings, done in a fluid paste of melted wax crayons, at times augmented with charcoal, fruit juices, shoe polish, and saliva. He applied it with matchsticks over pencilled designs. The bizarre medium yields a subtly potent density of colors, including black, which is lost in reproduction. Seen in the flesh, the lines and shadings stamp themselves on the eye. (It's as if your sight had suddenly improved.) Material textures give some works painting-like presence. Even with good paper at hand, Ramírez liked to quilt his surfaces from scraps, gluing them with a mixture of bread or oatmeal, saliva, and phlegm. He might attach strips of paper between his hatch lines, with a tactile appeal like that of chine collé (printmaking on layered sheets). Occasionally, he collaged images from magazines. The results, such as a glamour girl's head and shoulders on a drawn rider, are charming and even witty, but formally ragged. Beyond such japes, the only weak pictures in the show are what are quite likely large worksheets, on which Ramírez rehearsed miscellaneous ideas with little thought to their over-all unity.

What is it like to be an outsider? Outside what? Ramírez worked cogently from within his memory, imagination, and talent. He also belonged to an actual culture, that of a mid-century American mental hospital. His wombish mounds and tunnels lend themselves to psychoanalytic interpretation with suspect alacrity. I'll bet they excited the doctors. (We all develop our personal styles by noticing what people like about us, and exaggerating it.) A weekly movie night at DeWitt in the fifties probably featured Westerns, which might have reinvigorated Ramírez's memories of his equestrian days. Trains came and went near both Stockton and DeWitt. Bold drawings of a man seated at a table and, framed above him by converging walls, a passing locomotive—shades of "Folsom Prison Blues"—economically summarize the artist's situation. But Ramírez's work does exude distinct and poignant psychological content: a self-consoling, voluptuous escape into states alternately, or at once, maternal and virile—raptures of a loved boy. He surely suffered, but his subject was an accessible happiness.

Ramírez is one of the Big Three of twentieth-century outsiders, along with the institutionalized Swiss Adolf Wölfli (1864-1930) and the reclusive Chicago janitor Henry Darger (1892-1973), both subjects of memorable retrospectives at the Folk Art Museum. Ramírez differs in key respects from the two others. Unlike them, he seems not to have suffered a traumatic childhood. Nor did he evince pedophilia (acted on by Wölfli, projected in an epic narrative of girl warriors by Darger). Ramírez's art is less rich in formal invention than Wölfli's and in poetic resonance than Darger's, but it is more stylistically resolved and emotionally concentrated. He has in common with them an extravagant giftedness. All would have been stars in any art school, had they attended one. That they eluded contact with institutions of fine art owes something to personal disarray and something to chance, in a ratio impossible to gauge. It's a small thing, which makes them hard cases, exceptions proving the existence of a rule—that art, to be recognized as such, requires grounding in both individual biography and common culture. What can we do with and about the rush of pleasure and enchantment that the unlicensed genius of a Ramírez affords? I recommend taking it as a lesson in the limits of how we know what we think we know. Unable to regard such work as part of art's history, we may still have it be part of our own. ♦

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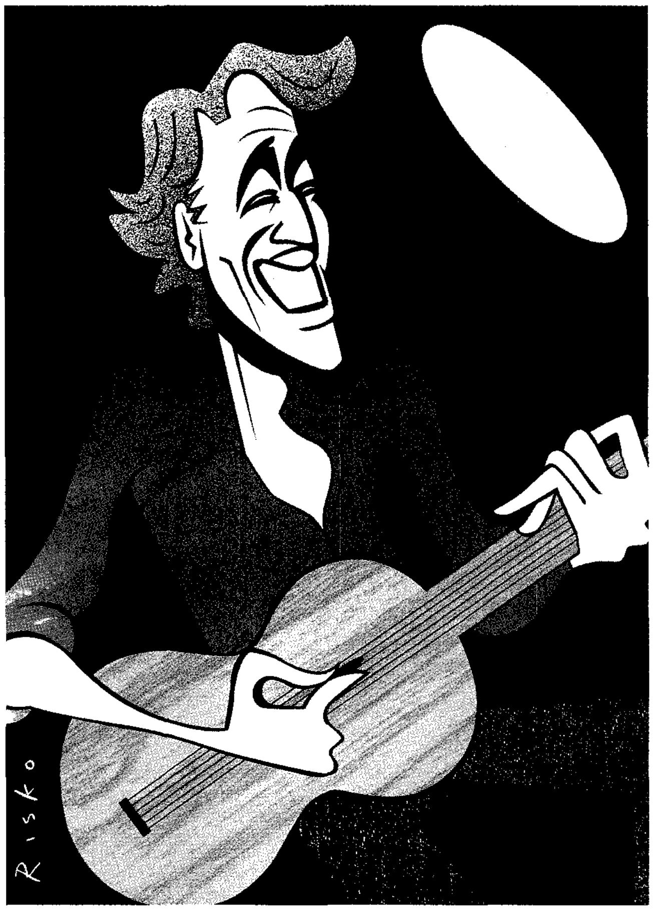
Caetano Veloso makes a rock album.

BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

In 1983, Bob Hurwitz, who worked for a jazz and classical label called ECM, attended a performance at the Public Theatre, in New York, by the Brazilian musician Caetano Veloso—his first show in America. "The audience was probably ninety per cent Brazilian," Hurwitz recalled. "Caetano played with a band, and then, in the middle of his set, did six or seven songs by himself, which was a rare thing for a Brazilian to do here. He sang in English once—a Cole Porter song. Then he brought out his son, Moreno, who was ten or eleven, to sing. It was magical."



Veloso is a singer of almost paralyzing grace and sweetness.

The following year, Hurwitz took over the classical label Nonesuch and signed Veloso. In September, 1985, Veloso returned to New York and recorded thirteen songs, using little besides his voice and a nylon-string acoustic guitar. He chose pieces that Brazilians knew by heart: "O Leãozinho" ("Little Lion"), a lilting ode to, as Veloso has described him, "a beautiful young man whose sign was Leo"; also "Terra," a long, melodically complex song inspired by photographs of the earth taken by astronauts. In addition, Veloso included a cover of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean," converting Jackson's tense dance music into a quiet, confident bossa nova and making the anxious denial of the original ("the kid is not my son") sound like a carefree dismissal. (Veloso's version also incorporated a snippet from "Eleanor Rigby"; it was as if he wanted Americans to know that he was not cowed by pop music's greats.) The resulting album, the glowing and precise "Caetano Veloso" (1986), was the first record by a pop artist to be released by Nonesuch. Veloso was forty-four years old.

Covering a Michael Jackson song with a classical guitar for a label associated with modern composers and recordings of Javanese gamelan players is the kind of counterintuitive act for which Veloso is famous. This week, at the age of sixty-four, he will release "Cê," a brisk, spare record that sounds more like indie rock than any of the other, highly varied music that he has made in the past forty years. Veloso's stylistic range and influence on his peers have earned him comparisons to Bob Dylan, but the two men could not be more different. As Veloso put it in an interview, Dylan "is an artist who hides his personality behind the art he is creating. He would never ever touch his work with explanation or analysis. And I am the opposite. I am almost not an artist." Veloso is a public figure in Brazil, appearing on Carnival floats and collaborating with local musicians. His lyrics tend to be poetic—on "Cê," he describes himself as a "rattlesnake bristling in the bushes" and his muse as a "coppery panther"—but he can be straightforward when his subject matter demands it. The title track of his 2001 album, "Noites do Norte" ("Northern Nights"), sets a passage from a book by the nineteenth-century Brazilian abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco to elegant music that could have come from a nineteen-sixties Frank Sinatra ballad, except that Nabuco's text begins, "For a long time, slavery will remain the national characteristic of Brazil."

A singer of almost paralyzing grace and sweetness, Veloso is also a high-minded rebel—a fact that is apt to be lost on listeners who don't understand Portuguese and are lulled by the preternatural calmness of his voice. One way around these obstacles is through Veloso's best-selling 1997 memoir, "Tropical Truth," which was recently translated into English and contains knotty ruminations on Brazilian history and the author's sexuality. "As a public figure I came close to what Andrew Sullivan called the 'ubiquitous, vaguely homoerotic' climate of the 'male pop groups of that period,'" he writes. "And today I surmise that those suggestions of androgyny, polymorphism, and indeterminacy that colored the post-Beatles (post-Elvis?) pop-music scene still threaten the conventions that underlie many acts of oppression." Veloso was jailed by Brazil's military dictatorship for fifty-five days in 1968-69—he was never charged with an offense, though an officer told him that he was disturbed by his use of the word "deconstruct" in interviews—but his music is rarely aggressive or bumptious.

His early inspirations were the whisper-soft bossa-nova patriarch João Gilberto and the placid, crystalline recordings made by Chet Baker and Miles Davis in the fifties. As a teen-ager, Veloso found Elvis Presley "a bit disgusting"; he claims that he began to like rock and roll only in 1966, when he was twenty-four. (Like many significant Brazilian songwriters of the last half century, Veloso occasionally makes music that verges on the soporific. When he embellishes his songs with a soprano-saxophone run or a polite drum shuffle, they lose their glimmering gentility and slip into passivity.)

"Cê" resists the anodyne charms of Brazilian pop, favoring loud, blocky rhythms more common to American garage bands. The album was produced by Veloso's son Moreno and the guitarist Pedro Sá, and performed by Veloso—an able acoustic-guitar player—with the help of Sá and two other young Brazilian musicians, a bassist and a drummer. It consists of twelve songs—most involving sex and anger—which Veloso taught to his three-piece rhythm section, and recorded quickly, adding few overdubs. The music can only loosely be described as rock. As with almost any genre that Veloso tackles, he has transformed it; the term doesn't apply at all to some of the quieter, more syncopated numbers. "Cê" is tightly focussed and austere, especially compared with the lush, cool jazz arrangements of his 1997 album, "Livro," or the robust Afro-Brazilian drumming on "Noites do Norte."

"Odeio" ("I Hate") seems to be about Veloso's recent separation from Paula Lavigne, a Brazilian film producer and actress with whom he has two children. The chorus translates as "I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate." Without a lyric sheet, though, it's hard to infer these sentiments from the music. The band plays behind Veloso in taut octaves, like a quieter version of the Strokes. Veloso sounds as suave as ever as he sings about a dolphin emerging from a purple sea, a "venus jasmine-diamond," and "someone's email." (He does not elaborate.) His voice, instead of rising to match the anger of his words, drops below his natural tenor range as he repeats the phrase *odeio você.*

In other songs, Veloso is more philosophical about breakups. "Não Me Arrependo" ("I Don't Regret") is a soft number that could have been lifted from one of his albums from the seventies. The music begins with a bass figure that is virtually a direct quote from Lou Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side," and proceeds through a series of chords more typical of Veloso's sophisticated, jazz-derived sense of harmony. Veloso, whose voice remains more inviting than declamatory, is compassionate here: "Not the biggest of your mistakes, or my mistakes, or my remorse will make it disappear. Look at these new people that we formed in us, and from us." It is a piercing comment on parenthood and responsibility, reminiscent in its candor of the work of Paul Simon, a musician who shares Veloso's restless intellect and melodic inventiveness.

"Homem" ("Man"), a perky track that sounds like an eighties song by the English New Wave act XTC, suggests how hard it is to extract Veloso from his language and his culture. In translation, the verse goes like this: "I'm not jealous of maternity, or of lactation. I'm not jealous of adiposity, or of menstruation. I only envy longevity, and multiple orgasms."

Veloso's Brazilian fans sing along, whether he's using words like "adiposity" or quoting Sartre. I witnessed the communion between Veloso and his audience in 1999, at the Beacon Theatre in New York, and you can hear it on Veloso's 2002 double CD, "Live in Bahia," especially in a performance of the 1977 song "Tigresa." Veloso's band is loud, stocked with Brazilian drummers and one overly audible guitarist, but, as he sings, you can hear the ghostly second voice of the crowd, as it repeats his every word. ♦

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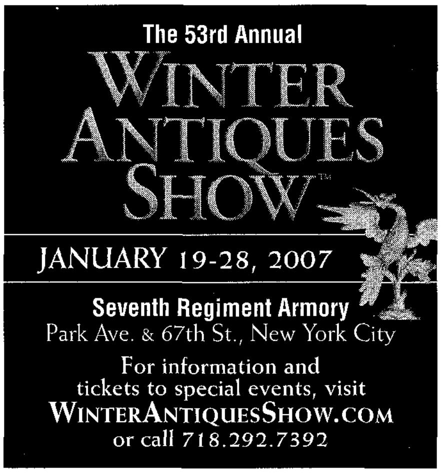
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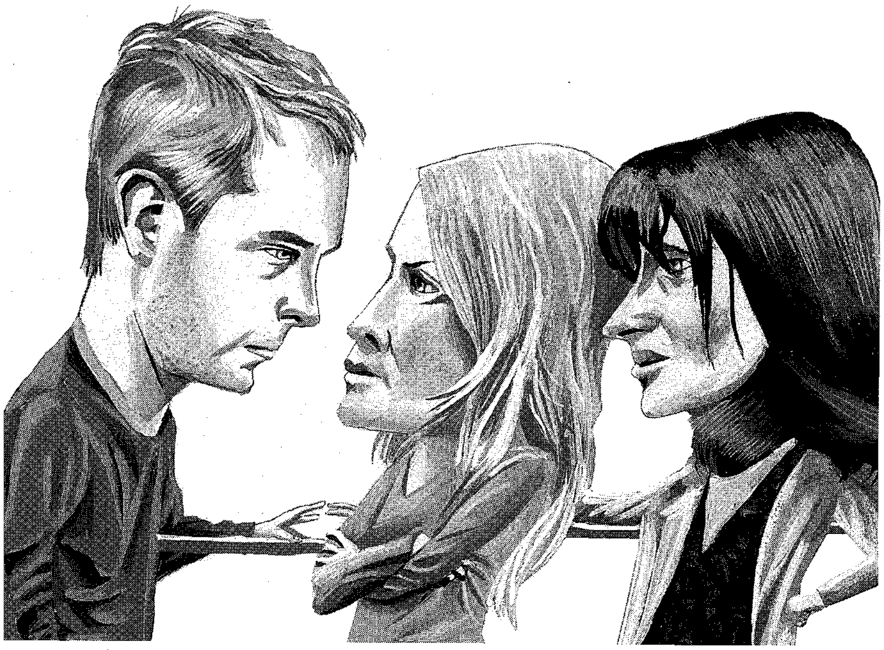
THE CURRENT CINEMA

CRIME SCENES

"Breaking and Entering" and "Smokin' Aces."

BY DAVID DENBY



Jude Law, Robin Wright Penn, and Juliette Binoche in Anthony Minghella's movie.

Here's one of the few rules in movies which matter: an actor won't last as a leading man unless he plays characters who want something passionately. Kirk Douglas and Burt Lancaster want power, and Buster Keaton and Clark Gable want girls. Gary Cooper and James Stewart seek justice; John Wayne and Clint Eastwood seek revenge. Humphrey Bogart and George Clooney demand candor from a duplicitous world. Fred Astaire wants to dance. Woody Allen has an incorrigible desire to make a joke, and Jim Carrey longs to turn his face and body into rubber. But what does Jude Law want? He is too honorable to just draw on his lascivious-cherub good looks. In the remake of "Alfie," playing a cheap stud, he was rueful and easy-tempered, and he seemed eager to cheer himself up—you could sense his discomfort. He has hidden behind makeup, in "Road to Perdition," and has played diffident men, in "The Talented Mr. Ripley" and "All the King's Men." In "Cold Mountain," he wanted to get home, but he was war-weary, rather than impassioned.

In Anthony Minghella's "Breaking and Entering," Law still has an exploratory quality. His Will Francis, a fashionable London landscape architect, is an irresolute young man—kindly, generous, and fair-minded, but also egotistical and careless. He's pulled in different directions, yet Law shows some anger this time, and some desire, too. At home, Will has a difficult life. His girlfriend of ten years, Liv (Robin Wright Penn), a melancholy, becalmed beauty of Swedish and American background, has a talented, vivid autistic daughter—a terrific gymnast who won't eat, sleep, or calm down. Will loves the girl, but both he and Liv are so preoccupied with her that they've lost touch with each other. Liv won't even look at him, and this is a man who demands to be looked at. At work, in a glass-roofed design shop in North London, he's part of an enormous reconstruction project in the King's Cross area—his job is to soften the steel-and-glass industrial spaces with reflecting pools and waterways. The firm's computers are stolen twice at night, so Will stakes out the office in his car. When there's another attempted break-in, he chases away the thief—Miro (Rafi Gavron), a fifteen-year-old boy—and follows him home to a council flat, where he discovers Miro's mother, Amira (Juliette Binoche), a Bosnian refugee with a refined face and a full peasant body. He's fascinated and, without letting on how he found her, starts an affair, going back and forth between the two women. However simple, this is a beginning: Jude Law wants love. "Breaking and Entering" is an affecting movie, and it's about a lot of things besides Will's problems. But it asks the question, Can Will become a husband? And behind this question is another: Can Jude Law become a leading man?

Anthony Minghella, the director of "Truly Madly Deeply" and "The English Patient," among other movies, is a romantic and a tenderhearted fellow. His version of North London is more benign than that of "Notes on a Scandal." As Minghella sees it, the place has turned into a multicultural gathering ground in which thieves and hookers from the Balkan breakup and other diasporas roam the streets. This North London is more ragged and bewildering than dangerous. Carrying their cultural baggage with them, the immigrants try to find some way of fitting in. Miro longs to be an architect like Will, but he has dropped out of school and become a deracinated cat burglar, jumping across rooftops. Amira, a classical pianist, makes her living as a tailor and a waitress. The African cleaning lady at Will's office reads Kafka. The sharp-tongued, huffy Balkan hooker (a hilarious Vera Farmiga) who climbs into Will's car during the stakeout is a brilliant psychologist of human nature. They all want to reclaim something denied to them as immigrants, and Minghella lets the scenes play at a leisurely pace, trying for illumination rather than urgency. The movie has a gentle, bemused intelligence, the tone of British liberalism at its most open-minded.

Will and Liv, slowly getting undressed at night, can't quite reach out to each other, and they settle for an affectionately grumpy acknowledgment that the relationship has lost its romantic power. Dissatisfaction is the common coin, but no one has given up. Will pursues Amira, and Juliette Binoche, who has functioned as an exquisite art-film object—all wistful longing—in such movies as "The English Patient" and Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Blue," gives her a darting nervousness and shyness mixed with desperate cunning. When the handsome English architect wants her, she's astonished, particularly after she discovers that he knows about her son's nocturnal activities, and Binoche shifts between lust and opportunism. She's a much more sexual actress in this movie than in anything she has done in years.

The movie becomes a complex dance of desire and deceit in which people behave badly. (The title refers not only to burglary but to Will's entering Amira's life on false pretenses.) But clemency, not judgment, is in Minghella's heart. Everyone deserves another chance; jumpy, vulnerable children have to be looked after, and loyalty matters more than anything. "Breaking and Entering," which ends with a burst of radiant good will, is a shrewd and decent movie rather than a great one, but it holds out some promise for the future: Jude Law has bestirred himself; he seems to be passing out of his dreamy, meditative trance. He may become a true leading man yet.

"Smokin' Aces" has a rabid, itchy, crack-den heartlessness to it—screw-you nihilism as a joke. Joe Carnahan, the writer-director, sets up a straightforward situation: the Mob has put out a million-dollar contract on Buddy Israel (Jeremy Piven), a popular Vegas night-club magician known as Aces. Buddy, it seems, was once a Mafia mascot, then ran his own criminal operation, and has recently become a menace to the last remaining Mafia boss in the country. Then Carnahan complicates the scenario: killers from all over the country, hoping to pick up the million, rush to Lake Tahoe to whack Buddy, who is holed up in a penthouse suite with a bevy of prostitutes lying about on the floor. Among the hit men there are black lesbians toting heavy guns, gay neo-Nazis with masks and horns, and professional assassins who bite off their own fingertips to avoid detection. The movie is a scuzz-bag jamboree. Ben Affleck appears as a dopey, low-rent bail bondsman with a thin mustache that crawls down his chin like a pair of worms on a rock.

What do you do with all these superfluous characters? You kill them off. Affleck, for instance, gets terminated before he establishes whatever character it is that he's meant to be playing. Carnahan, introducing his cast of goons, gives us brief scenes of murder, torture, and other delights, and, at the climax, in the Tahoe hotel, the various meatheads blow one another away, with the F.B.I., which is trying to protect Buddy so that he'll testify against the Mob boss, thrown in the middle. The cutting is so rapid that nothing that happens is remotely believable, but, of course, it's not intended to be. "Smokin' Aces" has been made with the kind of antic violence that wins a movie the honorific title of "black comedy." What that indicates in this case is that nothing makes sense—and that's supposed to be cool. Everyone involved, including the English producers, can feel down and dirty, as if they were mean hipsters pushing through old barriers and joyriding into areas of wild freedom.

In 2002, Carnahan, who is now thirty-seven, made an intense and violent little cop film, "Narc," with Jason Patric and Ray Liotta. He seemed to have absorbed the influences of John Cassavetes and Martin Scorsese and come up with a style of his own. I was a fan of that movie, but "Smokin' Aces" feels like Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill" pushed much further along into lethal absurdity. It's not that Carnahan can't write; there's juice and variety in the movie's foulmouthed idiom, and the actors have fun with it. Alicia Keys and Taraji Henson, as two female assassins, get a happy rhythm going; Jason Bateman has a brilliant bit as a masochistic lawyer; and Jeremy Piven exercises the talent for outrageous, gloating egotism that he developed on HBO's "Entourage." But, apart from the acting flourishes, the joke has run out on this kind of intentionally low-road filmmaking. The sudden acts of freaky carnage that might have produced whoops of shocked delight a decade ago now leave the audience cold. Nihilism, as a mode, burns itself up—here, the violence is too obviously a gathering of horror and action tropes (one of the neo-Nazis wields a chain saw) to produce more than a jaded sigh. And Carnahan hedges his bets. The F.B.I. agents (Ryan Reynolds and Ray Liotta) are honest and loyal to each other, and when one of them is killed we are supposed to be outraged. After all the jocular mayhem, however, it's far too late for "feelings." When Carnahan tries to tug at our emotions, he just compounds the whorish insensitivity of the movie. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Gahan Wilson, must be received by Sunday, January 28th. Finalists in the January 15th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 12th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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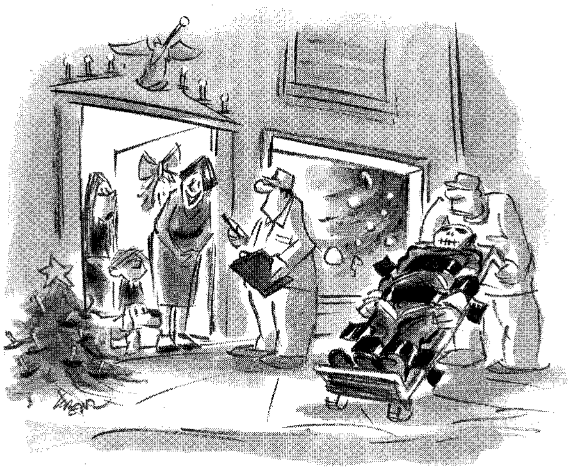
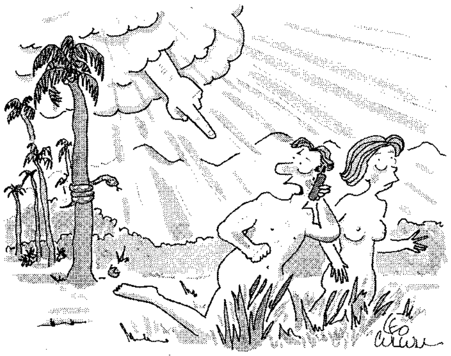


"It looks like someone's going to have the complete set!"
Judy Lennon, Reynoldsburg, Ohio



THE FINALISTS

"Listen, Satan, can I call you back?"
Bezan Madon, Old Bridge, N.J.

"It's like paradise for the first few days. But you wouldn't want to live here."
Richard Hine, New York City

"I gotta go. 'Mr. Wonderful' is having one of his episodes."
Charley Githler, Ithaca, N.Y.

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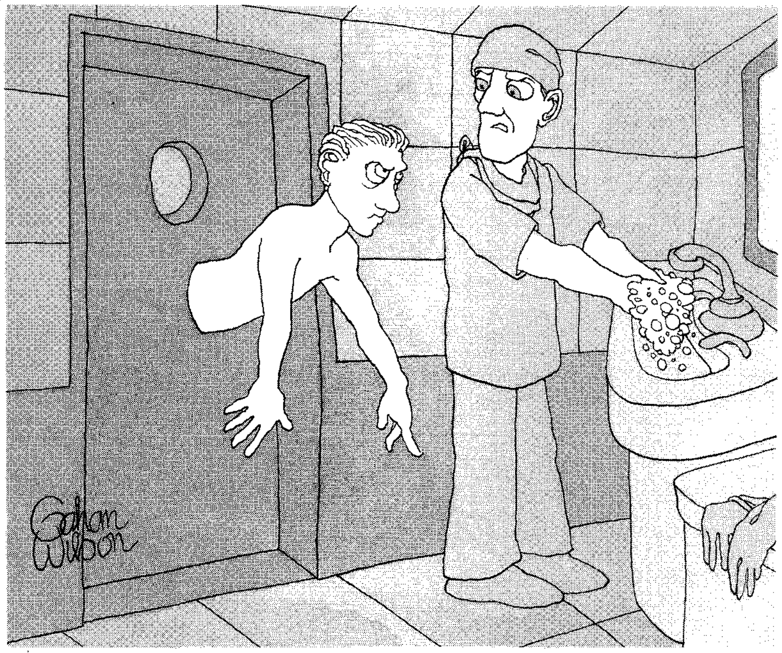

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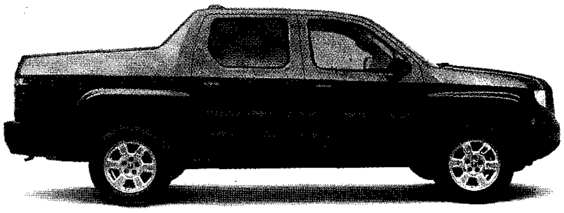
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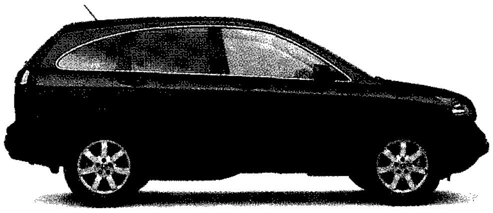
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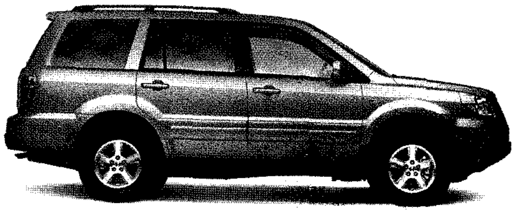
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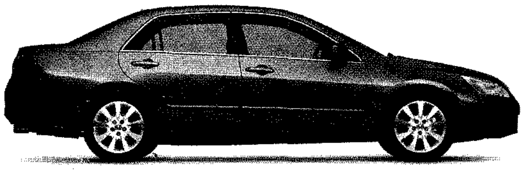
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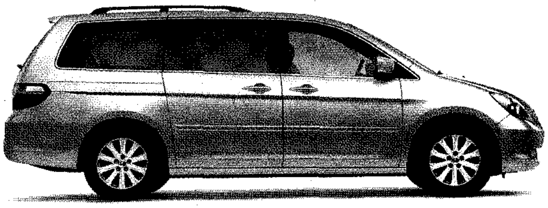
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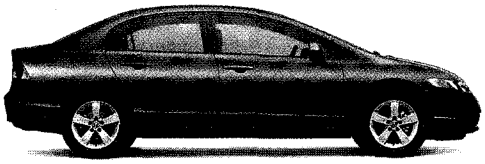
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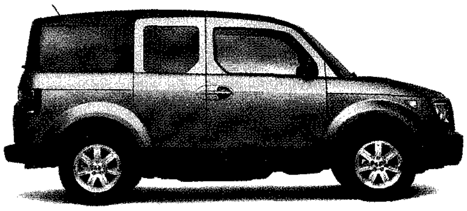
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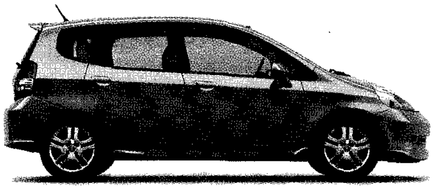
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